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THOREAU

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THOREAU

THE LIVING THOUGHTS OF

# THOREAU

PRESENTED BY

THEODORE DREISER



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HENRY DAVID THOREAU was born at Concord, Massachusetts, U.S.A., on July 12, 1817. Early in life he acquired a deep love of Nature which remained with him until his death. After passing through Harvard University without in any way distinguishing himself he became first a schoolmaster, then a ~~surveyor~~: his duties in the latter capacity allowing him ample time for lecturing and authorship. In 1845, desiring to prove that man could live independent of his fellows, he retired to Walden Woods where, in a hut built and furnished entirely by himself, he lived alone for two years, reading considerably, writing abundantly, and coming to know intimately the beasts, birds and fishes around him. *Walden, or, Life in the Woods*, his book based on these two years of solitude, was published in 1854. Thoreau died at the comparatively early age of forty-five, on May 6, 1862.

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THOREAU

BY

THEODORE DREISER

WHEN I THINK OF PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHERS AS they range through the centuries from earliest Greece to this hour, I am impressed with the fact that all are men of genius, temperamentally and deeply moved, like poets, by the phenomena of life by which they find themselves surrounded. And in that sense, and in that sense only, that is, temperamentally, wrestling with the *why* as well as the *how* of it all. For we know, of course, that science in its technical or practical approach toward the phenomena of existence has long since abandoned almost every hope of an answer to the *why* of things, and has concentrated on the *how* of what it sees going on about us. So Galileo, for instance, as early as sixteen hundred, troubled by the until then unsolved problem of whether the earth attracts all bodies with the same force or speed, made a test by dropping things of differing weights from a tower and found that one arrived as quickly as the other ; also, that to arrive at the same time, none required that it be either pushed, pulled, or acted on in any way other than by the one force attracting it to the earth. Simple, seemingly ; and yet thousands of years of observations by men of their environment had passed before these primary facts were arrived at. Then, too, the fact of gravitation as a law was only established by Newton as late as 1666.

From then on science has proceeded almost exclusively to concern itself with the *how*, not the *why*. At the same time, the philosopher and dreamer or poet, while profiting by

science and on occasion being identical with the scientist, has never ceased to concern himself with the thought of, or as I see it, he has unceasingly reacted to, the mystery of *why*. For there is, of course, this matter-energy which fills all space. There are these various laws by which the different forms of matter-energy are regulated, or by which they describe their inherent nature and therefore to which they voluntarily conform. In other words, they are either regulated by something (God is one word often used to describe that something, also Spirit, Brahma, Divine Essence, or Force) or, being all in all in space and time, they are, *collectively*, the equivalent of this imaginary something. And whether self-regulatory or not, they still conform to laws which are the equivalent of self-regulation and hence of the essence or spirit otherwise assumed to inhabit or inform them.

Through what they are and do they express its uttermost character and being. And by us, as reacting evocations of the same, they can only be spoken of as the universe. And only such laws and actions as have been scientifically verified can be ascribed to them. All else must be shunned or ignored. For, nowadays, the scientists insist that philosophical generalizations must be founded on scientific results. All talk of any supreme regulating and hence, legal or directing force or spirit is *out*. There is no known God or Spirit. He cannot be scientifically described *in toto*, if even in part. Hence the unconscious confession of scientific defeat and even confusion in the title of the verified and so staggering body of evolutionary and historic biological, chemical and physical data which Ernst Haeckel included in his truly great work, *The Riddle of the Universe*. Hence also the tentative, non-committal comment by scientists anywhere of the seeming universality of law, or state or condition, physical or chemical, maintained in any portion of space, as in a sidereal system for instance. Even time-space,

which is now assumed as relative, is therefore more or less of an illusion. Yet side by side with all this, in all branches of science, is constant and non-changing reference to creative thought or deduction via increased nervous sensitivity to already long-existing data, as though man, an evocation of this non-understandable universe of matter-energy-space-time, could individually and mentally be creative, whereas that from which he derives could in no wise be.

It is at this point that the *why*-asking, scientifically informed but mentally non-creative philosopher, parts company with the *how-limited* scientists of the laboratories and the mathematically-minded calculators of the libraries and universities. For he continues to ask *why*.

For all its knowledge of *how*, science cannot say *why*. And furthermore, it starts nervously at the faintest suggestion that man, powered as a chemical and physical contrivance of exterior forces, in responding to and synthesizing these in-pouring and down-pouring stimuli, may be nothing more than a radio or television device—and that the same may be true with animals, insects, vegetation. In short, that as a television station distributes voices, colours, forms, motions, and ideas or thoughts via sounds and gestures—so some extraplanetary forces may be broadcasting man and human life to this planet.

That, of course, carries to a logical conclusion the vast mass of data which tends to demonstrate that man is a cosmic implement or tool. But to that point our scientific mechanist refuses to proceed. He has not, as yet, he says, assembled sufficient data to warrant so esoteric a deduction. We must wait. None-the-less, the idealist believes in cosmic law—and the mindlike processes which accompany it—in the engineering or technical genius which accompanies the construction, operation, continuance and dissolution of everything on this planet. He assumes that this could be the work of some superior force in the matter-energy-

space-time continuum, something for instance that inhabits and directs that which everywhere appears as directed matter-energy; something, in other words, that plans what matter-energy does and is to do. Alas, there's the rub. For that would be a God, name it as we choose. And if good or evil be introduced into the picture, as man assuredly feels both to be in the picture or process, as he finds it here, then, in his thought, at least, this super-force or intellect or mind would be the author of both.

But here one crosses again to the realm of the speculative philosopher, the idealist or dreamer or visionary, who chooses, in at least some cases, to study carefully what science has assembled and who, from that vantage point, insists that the data already assembled indicate the existence and rule of such a master, that its nature and its spirit are fully written or set forth in that which man senses of himself here, as well as through the tools and guides his creator has evolved for him. But of course, there is a third conclusion, that all our questioning is only too meaningless. There may be in the universe only a process. An eternal equation may be the very nature of things.

The most recent individual who has interested me in connection with this problem is Henry David Thoreau, the recluse of Concord, who for so long a time was thought of not at all as a philosopher but rather as a naturalist, essayist, prose poet, and Nature lover, with at best some eccentric views of the society by which he found himself surrounded and which, for the most part, he chose to ignore.

As a matter of fact, in the strict or academic sense of the word, Thoreau cannot be looked upon as a philosopher at all. He appears never to have once thought of arranging or compiling his ideas in relation to the problem of things and their causes here on earth or in space-time after the fashion of Spinoza, or Kant, or Hegel, or Spencer. That he had thoughts, as well as most definite deductions in connection

with most of the matters that engage the speculative thinkers of even our day, is very clear from the fourteen published volumes of notes that he left, to say nothing of *Walden*, or *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, or his letters and essays. Although his thoughts are scattered higgledy-piggledy through these volumes and the twenty-two years of his writing life, and run the gamut of most of the by now stereotyped problems of life or matter-energy in space-time, still, if you are enough interested, you can piece them together for yourself, as I have done or attempted to do in this volume. And here, as you may see for yourself, you find him dwelling on mind in Nature, form in Nature, time, change, knowledge and its source and limitation, beauty and art, truth and error, reality and illusion, the problem of morals, of free or controlled will, of the emotions, of good and evil in the cosmic sense, of sorrow and joy, mercy and cruelty, society, religion, justice, death and even a future life !

But in the order I have arranged them, no. Or with any suggestion of integrated thought as these headings and their subordinated topics suggest, not at all. But in greater variety and profusion than any such arbitrary and abbreviated selection as is here made could possibly indicate.

For Thoreau, poet-wise, and having at the same time the intense energy of the seeker and also the dreamer, was forever knocking at the door of the mystery through all the days of his materially as well as time-restricted life. (He died at the age of 45.) More, he was ever spell-bound before the beauty of life. Indeed, although for the most part he can only hint at the probable evolution of some of its marvels (he wrote before Darwin), and point to seeming rules or laws that govern the form, growth, struggles, decoration and persistence of all of them, still, nearly all that he has to say comes to you as a song, the song of a mystic force, embodying itself through beauty.

Of course, as a young man he was practically embedded in the upward and onward atmosphere of Concord and transcendental New England, the same atmosphere that originally made of Emerson a minister. Born in Concord, Massachusetts, in July 1817, he was by degrees made part and parcel of a town that was just emerging into an intellectual prominence as a cultural spot of New England Puritanism. Indeed, by the time he was thirty-one he was already overshadowed in the mind of a public that scarcely knew him—and where it did, did not understand him—by Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Bronson Alcott, William Ellery Channing. With these men, much to the loss of America at large, Thoreau quickly became confused. For in him, to my way of thinking, both philosophically and from the point of exquisite poetry in prose form, is the best that New England of that period has to show. And fortunately, although much belittled by the private criticism of the hour, and even since, although looked on as an imitator and even aper of Emerson, and even as pretending to more than his merit warranted, the rich, if retiring and ascetic, mood of this man has more and more come to be understood for what it is, a really important, highly poetic contribution to the metaphysical ultimates of philosophy as well as to the data of science.

His beliefs shared somewhat, but more or less in a fashionable sense, in what the Transcendentalists believed : that is, the existence of the over-soul, and the Hegelian theory of the reflection of natural mind in Nature, the vision of the ideal and so on. But this aspect of his thought is more or less superficial and far removed from its content. As a matter of fact, his thought was remarkably free of "influences" in the way of personalities, books and so on. To be sure, at Harvard and at home he studied his share of the Greek and Roman classics, the English poets, some Oriental scriptures, to say nothing of Emerson, a life-long friend and

of Carlyle. But no influence can be compared with his own poetic and profound reaction to the ordinary countryside around him, which he made the material of his writing.

In common especially with the Transcendentalists, as well as with many other "moral" and "romantic" philosophers, he can be said to share these two beliefs (1) that solitary contemplation of nature brought a harmony with the spiritual force which created the world, and (2) that what is right is so by reference to intuition. Of course, John Foxe had that thought, and after him the Friends or Quakers. Also John Woolman, whom, in many of his solitary communion deductions, Thoreau resembles. Also Buddha, Jesus, and Lao-Tze.

But although this may be his self-confessed method, how utterly different his results! Here was no *a priori* moral system. Substitute compulsion or inner necessity for intuition, and for his communion or contemplation, a gifted, almost telepathic, sensory reaction, and you will take away from his method all the hazy, unreal verbiage, which is the usual method within a method of ensuring moral and social ends predetermined in advance of the application of the method.

Ethically, his "intuition," or his naturally impeccable honesty, frugality, and his feeling of obligation to life and society for his presence here made him only too willing to make and pay for his own way. He wished to repay those who had cared for him in his youth what might be due them, and in addition otherwise so to conduct himself as not only to exemplify the principles which he felt to be holding in Nature but also to permit him, as he felt justly, to criticize others in society in general for any laxity they might manifest toward a possible social structure which should embody all that he felt to be just and constructive and so, commendable.

In that sense, he reminds me of some of the most arresting

characters in history, whether it be Diogenes with his lantern, Christ with his dismissal of all thought for the to-morrow —what ye shall eat or what ye shall wear—Buddha, walking from his palace to a Bo tree, St. Francis with his imitation of Christ, Thomas à Kempis, likewise, or, to come nearer our own time, Jan Huss, John Foye, John Bunyan, John Woolman. All these men were arrested by the beauty and the mystery of life, the joy and the pain, the ignorance and the wisdom, the good and the evil, the birth and the death. And each seeking to find something above technical structures in life to solve the orphaned ache of one who is not ready to believe that for all his ills or grievances or longings, he is to be dismissed at death, with death A sad tale, mates !

For myself, I am free to say that of all my philosophic and scientific reading of recent years from Democritus to Einstein, these scattered notes of Thoreau impress me as being more illuminative, not of the practical results or profits of science (which have in our time so led to an increasingly complicated mass of material as well as to mental or ideational structures, with their accompanying compulsions to greater physical as well as to so-called "mental" dexterities, that they well nigh befuddle if not wreck the man-mechanism which has to deal with them) but of the implications of scientific results or cosmology. For Thoreau as well as Loeb, and at this hour Einstein, in fact, all up-to-the-hour science, look upon man and life, chemical and physical, as directed but in the purely mechanical sense. Immutable law binds us all. Only, he was not, as so many are, willing to label the process as mechanical and stop there. He preferred, or rather, as I should say, he was compelled by his sensory reactions to all things, to view them as but dimly conscious mechanisms directed by a superior and pervasive something which has not only evolved them, but, like the centripetal force or

essence in the heart of an atom which keeps its revolving electrons from flying tangentially outward and away, holds them in place and order. Thus in *Walden* you find him asserting, "We are not wholly involved in Nature. I may be either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it." And again, on the same page, "However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it; and that is no more *I* than it is *you*." (Italics mine). And again, same page, "I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another"—which, as you can see, is far from looking upon himself as a will-less, thoughtless machine, but rather, possibly, as the inhabitant *in part* of a machine or instrument built by another—the manufacturer let us say of all man-known machines—in which one is permitted to dwell but not to direct, since one is there, as he says, only as a "spectator, sharing no experience." And, as if to clinch this man-machine conclusion, he adds (*The Week*, p. 408), "Our present senses are but the rudiments of what they are destined to become." Which is not unlike Henry Ford saying, "Wait till you see my 1940 model. It will have everything."

I am sure that I shall appear to be imposing on Thoreau an ultra-modern and ultra-mechanistic approach to the problem or mystery of nature, but this is because I am selecting at this point a few of his most essential comments relating to this particular problem and ignoring the endless ramblings of his exploring mind through all phases of philosophic speculation from will-lessness to free-will, from almost divine guidance to accidental mechanistic sufficiency.

Really, having read about 2,400,000 words of this

selected material, I feel as though Thoreau lived a kind of cycle, going from the one extreme of colourful concrete natural description to a most vaporous, enormous profundity. The only figure which occurs to me is as if some god who was alive at the beginning of the world should break through in Thoreau, and remember something of what Nature's mind is. Now it seems to me that almost all his comments on men, society, the vindictive and critical side of his nature, his moral views, are not really essential to his greatness at all, but only necessitated by the superficially physical bounds of his being. I feel as if he were tapping some marvellous, musical, lyrical source, which *was* life, which is a dream. It is the same sustaining assumption that is in poetry, in music, the same figure as comes to one from a consideration of archaic art, like the figures of the animals in the caves in France and Spain, the Greek myths—the optimism, the grandeur of the vision of an unconquerably limitless universe, rushing and sounding furiously and noiselessly at once.

This suggestion of force, of something cloudy and beautiful, fearless, not taking thought—all in one thing—that it is which he intimates of nature. That is where his inconsistencies count for nothing, because, as I see it, his *source* is inconsistent. That is why he rejects with more than necessary fervour for a god all the doings of men which obtrude themselves on his vision. He seems to have hold of something when he sits on his hillsides and watches the sky and the sun and stars, trees and birds. It is the source of them all which he is feeling, a passion for what is, in another sense, pure relativity. Where he seems foolish, it is only a denial of this nature-feeling in himself or others. Although at times he seems so, or asserts that he is, he is not sad, nor does his vision crucify him, because he seems more than man, and at the same time is perfectly content to know his universe to be only what he can see. He is saying

over and over, the universe exists for me ; he instinctively knows this, and he will milk every ounce of sensation out of it that he can. And because he is more primitive than modern he is more sensate than social, more optimistic than pessimistic. I mean by *primitive* someone who is less dependent on men than most are to-day, and can see beyond a race, a time, or to-day, and praise the whole.

In fact, in several places he scornfully comments on the mental or knowledge advantages of the microscope or other such instruments. For instance :

" All science is only a make-shift, a means to an end which is never attained . . . all description is postponed till we know the whole, but then science itself will be cast aside. But unconsidered expressions of our delight, which any natural object draws from us are something complete and final in themselves, since all nature is to be regarded as it concerns man ; and who knows how near to absolute truth such unconscious affirmations may come ? " (Italics mine.)

Or, again,

" Things seen with a microscope begin to be insignificant. So described, they are as monstrous as if they should be magnified to a thousand diameters. Suppose I should see and describe men and houses and trees and birds as if they were a thousand times larger than they are ! With our prying instruments we disturb the balance and the harmony of nature."

But this is not all. Suppose we take the old but still debatable assumption or conclusion, as you will, that there is no such thing as free will. To see what Thoreau concludes as to this see pages 65-9 of this text but here let me quote the following :

" First of all a man must see, before he can say."

" Who produces a perfect work is obedient to laws yet unexplored."

"I repeatedly find myself drawn toward certain persons but to be disappointed." (Italics mine.)

"I realize that men may be born to a condition of mind at which others arrive in middle age by the decay of their poetic faculties."

"That is an unfortunate discovery, certainly, that of a law which binds us where we did not know that we were bound."

"It is in vain to write on chosen themes. We must wait till *they* have kindled a flame in our minds." (Italics mine.)

Or, suppose we take that time-worn moot point, the problem of knowledge, and listen to him speak.

"The gods can never afford to leave a man in the world who is privy to any of their secrets. They cannot have a spy here. They will at once send him packing. How can you walk on ground when you see through it?"

"We shall see but little if we require to understand what we see. How few things can a man measure with the tape of his understanding."

"When I look at the stars, nothing which the astronomers have said attaches to them, they are so simple and remote. Their knowledge (the astronomers') is felt to be all terrestrial and to concern the earth alone. It suggests that the same is the case with every object; . . . our so-called knowledge of it is equally vulgar and remote."

Or, if you choose, see how he sets forth to establish nature as all mind, man and all things as the mere out-breathing of endless, aesthetic and even emotional wisdom —the emotional wisdom which Eddington seems to suggest as characterizing the atom, and, if so, then the electrons and protons composing the atom, and, if so, then the central centrifugal force holding electrons and protons in place against all other exterior atomic attraction.

"Who placed us with eyes between a microscopic and a telescopic world?"

"The pond does not thunder every night, and I do not know its law exactly. . . . Yet it has its law to which it thunders obedience when it should, as surely as the buds expand in the spring. *For the earth is all alive and covered with feelers of sensation, papillæ.*" (Italics mine.)

"The very sod is replete with mechanism far finer than that of a watch, and yet it is cast under our feet to be trampled on. The process that goes on in the sod and the dark, about the minute fibres of the grass—the chemistry and the mechanics—before a single green blade can appear above the withered herbage, if it could be adequately described, would supplant all other revelations"

"I love the birds and beasts because they are mythologically in earnest. I see that the sparrow cheeps and flits and sings adequately to the great design of the universe; that man does not communicate with it, understand its language, because he is not *one* with nature" (Italics mine.)

Certified as he was constantly by direct observation of all that went on about him—in the woods and fields, the earth, water, air and sky, in the actions of men and animals, birds, fishes, insects, flowers, the movements of winds, waters, suns and planets—he reached the very definite conclusion, easily to be illustrated by a thousand passages from his writings, that underlying all is a universal, artistic, constructive genius. Whether this is above law, and yet expressing itself through law, or timelessly existing as energized law, with or without power to rest, however much it may change, seems neither here nor there to him.

At least, in no passage that I know of does he directly and expressly front and formulate this matter. Instead he contents himself, through all the years of his cogitating life, to emphasizing its methods. Also its artistry; also its mercy or cruelty; justice or injustice; its infinite skill and patience, or at times, as in cosmic or earthly and material tumult (storms, quakes, explosions, riot and what not, by which sudden and seemingly none too orderly results are brought about), its seeming and yet *not* necessarily real hurry

or disorder. For at no point in connection with all this is he willing to imply, let alone admit, the absence, even for any fraction of time, of a universal and apparently beneficent control, which, however dark and savage its results or expressions may seem to us at times, is none-the-less, in some larger and realer sense, the substance of something that in its infinite breadth and allness and duration is good—and more, artistically beautiful and satisfying, and so, well intended for all Let us pick, for instance, the following :

" In the wildest Nature, there is not only the material of the most cultivated life, and a sort of anticipation of the last result, but a greater refinement already than is ever attained by man "

" Suppose I see a single green apple, brought to perfection on some thorny shrub, far in a wild pasture where no cow has plucked it. It is an agreeable surprise. What chemistry has been at work there? It affects me somewhat like a work of art. I see some shrubs which cattle have browsed for twenty years, keeping them down and compelling them to spread, until at last they are so broad they become their own fence and some interior shoot darts upward and bears its fruit! What a lesson to man! "

" I see in the path some rank thimble-berry shoots covered with that peculiar hoary bloom very thickly. It is only rubbed off in a few places down to the purple skin, by some passing hunter perchance. It is a very singular and delicate outer coat, surely, for a plant to wear. I find that I can write my name in it with a pointed stick very distinctly, each stroke, however fine, going down to the purple. It is a new kind of enamelled card. What is this bloom, and what purpose does it serve? Is there anything analogous in animated nature? It is the *coup de grâce*, the last touch and perfection of any work, a thin elysian veil cast over it, through which it may be viewed. It is breathed on by the artist, and thereafter his work is not to be touched without injury. It is the evidence of a ripe and completed work, on which the unexhausted artist has breathed out of his superfluous genius, and his work looks through it as a veil. If it is a poem, it must be invested with a similar bloom by the imagination of the reader. It is the subsidence of superfluous ripeness."

And again

" We can never have enough of Nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigour, vast and titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder-cloud, and the rain which last three weeks and produces freshets. *We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander.* We are cheered when we observe the vulture feeding on the carrion which disgusts and disheartens us, and deriving health and strength from the repast. There was a dead horse in the hollow by the path to my house, which compelled me sometimes to go out of my way, especially in the night when the air was heavy, but the assurance it gave me of the strong appetite and inviolable health of Nature was my compensation for this. I love to see that Nature is so rich with life that myriads can be afforded to be sacrificed and suffered to prey on one another, that tender organizations can be so serenely squashed out of existence like pulp—tadpoles which herons gobble up, and tortoises and toads run over in the road, and that sometimes it has rained flesh and blood! With the liability to accident, we must see how little account is to be made of it. The impression made on a wise man is that of universal innocence. Poison is not poisonous after all, nor are any wounds fatal. *Compassion is a very untenable ground.* It must be expeditious. Its pleadings will not bear to be stereotyped" (Italics mine.)

" Nature is slow but sure, she works no faster than need be, she is the tortoise that wins the race by her perseverance, she knows that seeds have many other uses than to reproduce their kind. In raising oaks and pines she works with a leisureliness and security answering to the age and strength of the trees. If every acorn of this year's crop is destroyed, never fear! she has more years to come. It is not necessary that a pine or an oak should bear fruit every year, as it is that a pea-vine should. So, botanically, the greatest changes in the landscape are produced more gradually than we expected. If Nature has a pine or an oak wood to produce, she manifests no haste about it."

All the more startling then, it is, after all this, to find him, in paragraph after paragraph where he deals with not only the natural but the social life around him, that of wood,

field and stream as well as the men and women of Concord, painting the most painful pictures of the outcome of so many of the struggles of the creatures of this well-intending and artistic universe, which, following the instincts or compulsions provided them, seek to survive and fulfil their ordered destiny. Thus, from *Familiar Letters*, p. 293—a letter to Harrison Blake, I excerpt :

" You little dream who is occupying Worcester when you are all asleep. Several things occurred there that night which I will venture to say were not put into the *Transcript*. A cat caught a mouse at the depot, and gave it to her kitten to play with. So that world-famous tragedy goes on by night as well as by day, and Nature is emphatically wrong "

Also :

" ' Oh, the muskrats are the greatest fellows to gnaw their legs off. Why I caught one once that had just gnawed his third leg off, this being the third time he had been trapped ; and he lay dead by the trap for he couldn't run on one leg.' "

Or :

" I see, at Martial Miles's, two young woodchucks, taken sixteen days ago, when they were perhaps a fortnight old. There were four in all, and they were dug out by the aid of a dog. *The mother successively pushed out her little ones to save herself*, and one was at once killed by the dog."

Or :

" Just within the edge of the wood there, I see a small painted turtle on its back, with its head stretched out, as if to turn over. Surprised by the sight, I stopped to investigate the cause. It drew in its head at once, but I noticed that its shell was partially empty. I could see through it from side to side as it lay, its entrails having been extracted through large openings just before the hind legs. The dead leaves were flattened for a foot over, where it had been

operated on, and were a little bloody—most likely it was done by some bird of the heron kind which has a long and powerful bill. . . . Such is Nature, who gave one creature a taste, or yearning for another's entrails as its favourite tid-bit!"

Or.

"Walking through the Lee farm swamp, a dozen or more rods from the river, I found a large box-trap closed. I opened it and found in it the remains of a grey rabbit, skin, bones and mould—closely fitting the right-angled corner of one side. It was wholly inoffensive, as so much vegetable mould, and must have been dead some years. None of the furniture of the trap remained but the box itself, with a lid which just moved on two rusty nails, the stick which held the bait, the string, etc., were all gone. The box had the appearance of having been floated off in an upright position by a freshet! It had been a rabbit's living tomb. He had gradually starved to death in it."

Or :

"Birds certainly are afraid of man. They allow all other creatures—cows and horses, etc.—excepting only one or two kinds, birds or beasts of prey, to come near them, but not man. What does this fact signify? Does it not signify that man, too, is a beast of prey to them? Is he, then, a true lord of creation, whose subjects are afraid of him, and with reason? They know very well that he is not humane, as he pretends to be."

I cite these various comments at such length because they demonstrate more clearly than any words of my own Thoreau's wide and poetic response to the creative principle which, as you can see, he views as something above our comprehension of either good or evil, mercy or cruelty, art or the lack of it—as something other than these things yet out of which all of them take their rise. For, in another place, he writes

"Farming and building and manufacturing and sailing [and he

might have added railroading and airplaning and cooking and radioing and acting—T. D.] are the greatest and wholesomest amusements that were ever invented (for God invented them) and I suppose that the farmers and mechanics know it, only I think they indulge to excess generally, and so what was meant for a joy becomes the sweat of the brow”

In sum, while quarrelling in so many places and ways with the doings of men, if not of animals, and imputing to them in one place free will, in another the lack of it, always there is in him this consciousness of that over-soul or energy genius that he pictures and that knows all, does all, is all. And yet thinking of this omnipresent as well as omnipotent essence or force as being *in its contrivances* as well as *making them*—its poor little ants fighting their battles, its pathetic muskrats biting their legs off when caught in traps in order to escape, its fearful little mother woodchucks shoving out their children to the howling dogs in order to save themselves, its rabbits dying pathetically in storm-swept traps—he, Thoreau, like the prophet Job, can cry, as by implication he does : “ Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

Something different from ordinary philosophizing, my dear kind reader. Something of the prophet zealot, the saint, but most emphatically and at the same time the fact-seeking researcher who insists on gathering the evidence and contemplating it himself before asserting that he will “ trust Him.”

Out of the many problems which, due to his twenty-three years of research and meditation, are set forth in his many notes, I have chosen to emphasize here but these three or four, since these seem to me to be basic in all philosophies, or, to put it better, in philosophy. In the pages which follow this preface you will find the others : Will, the Emotions, Knowledge, Morals, Good and Evil, Beauty, Form in Nature, Time, Society, Government, Religion, Art, Music, Genius, Death ; in all, aspects of the all-

pervasive essence whether it is energy, or something different. Or much better, turn to the eighteen volumes which embody his writings, and wander with that acute, artistic and poetic nature over all those phases of the world and the universe where he touches mentally upon them. In those, not only a great pleasure but a true revelation awaits you. The man is a world genius, like Shakespeare, like Plato, like Whitman, much more related to all Nature and time and change than to Concord or the United States. This side of the Bible or Shakespeare or the entire range of philosophy you will find nothing more refreshing or stimulating. In all certitude his own notes or reflections are immensely more important than any book such as this one, any of the volumes of selections from his works, or any biography or history of him or of his time. His time ! I cannot but smile at that. It knew *nothing* of him. *Nothing*.

It has been said of Thoreau by some who were greatly troubled as to the import of his twenty-three years of naturalistic tramping, his patient, silent and day-and-night-long lurkings in the woods and fields and about the lakes and streams and thickets of his region, to surprise and catch, as it were, Nature at her seemingly secret, and yet never really so, labours, that he evidently planned a very grand and comprehensive piece of work. Some believe he planned to make a complete survey of man in relation to the environs of Concord, and of Concord in relation to man. The endless data on the natural history of the region, the dates of the coming and departure of the birds, the notations about the blooming time of flowers, the catalogue of trees and plants and insects and animals which grew in the region, reports and so on, are thought to be evidence of this. One by one Thoreau took up the study of natural surroundings. It has been noted that what he intended to take up next, at the time of his premature death, was the study of rocks and minerals in the region.

His thesis, said to be behind all this, was that man, as an individual, is related to the rest of Nature, and since he abhorred the view which tied men to institutions, or any one phase of Nature, he was determined to show it to be otherwise, with Concord arbitrarily picked as a hub for the centre of his labours, since he was born and economically constrained to live and work there. It was man, as an implement or mechanism directly identified with the universe, man in the universe which was spread out around him, which Thoreau thought was the proper study of his thought. In other words, the universe, or nature, was spread in waves around a man, in as close concentration as various phenomena were close to him—like the earth, trees, men, flowers, birds, plants and so on, outward to the rarer atmosphere of clouds, moon, stars, space-time. Thoreau did not care for specialization or technical information which did not conform to the relative positions of men and natural phenomena, as he saw these ; and it cannot be too much emphasized that Thoreau did not consider man as a social organism or part of one. He was a universal organism. He was not merely related to men, not merely a church member, a father, a husband, a store-keeper, an American, a soldier, a lodgemember, a voter.

These things, according to Thoreau's scheme, were trifling incidents of a far greater and more intense relation—since man was a product of evolution, a child of the earth, an eater of vegetables and meat, an inhabitant of the banks of rivers and the shores of oceans, a tamer of animals, shined on by the sun, a breather of air, blown on by winds, a gazer at the moon and stars, a member of the universe. And it was his relations of this last kind which he intended to report in his history of Concord or man in Concord. Although phenomena may be general, he would say it is the locale makes the individual, and it was the local variations of universal forces which interested Thoreau.

In the chapters that follow which have to do with human problems specifically, with society, money and so on, you will find that Thoreau believes in optimism, that the feeling of evident justification for things as they are and as he senses them to be in nature, outside of man, should also be the quality of human life. Life is not to be spent anticipating a reward or not, or endured, or anything of the kind, but is to be enjoyed down to the last detail. If life is to be lived thus, it must be according to instinct, obeying all the truest reflection of any species or race, and with as large a view as it affords. This means that, according to Thoreau, the senses, instincts and possibilities of each thing must all be exhausted, but not at the expense of each other. According to Thoreau the animals, trees and birds must be happy while they are alive and engaged in the process of getting sustenance by ordinary natural processes. Man is superior or different to the other species in faculty and in the possibility of enjoying nature more than other animals, and also has the power of being more in error, or more nearly dead or dull, as Thoreau usually describes man in his mistakes.

At the same time, if Thoreau had understood as little about men as he did about fishes and birds ; in other words, if he could have truly looked on men as they would have appeared to him without understanding, and as he himself was compelled, through being a man himself, to view the fishes and birds, he would have had better things to say of them. For every time he isolates himself, and looks at man in Nature, as, for instance at a man fishing or hunting or as an animal, he has better things to say of him. But when he is compelled to seek out and understand men's motives, and especially their interactions, as in society, he has only contempt, rarely pity. Very early he appears to have made up his mind as to what was needed in this world for each man, and he despised other ends and other means—the ends as futile and the means as insufficient.

For Thoreau, in the first place, poverty, material asceticism, were indispensable. Wealth, too much food, too luxurious and comfortable surroundings, were a bar to living, a real obstruction to happiness. According to him, a man should have food, enough to sustain him, but not rich or expensive food. More likely something he had grown, and could get for himself. Also a man should have clothes, but not stylish clothes, or many. Rather something to keep him warm and dry, as the occasion demanded. And he should have a house, but like his Walden house. Not a house full of conveniences and with many rooms.

Again, a man should live alone. He should not be dependent on society. He should have such mental and emotional self-sufficiency as would tide him over all the crises of his days, and not be running hither and yon for comfort, and for (to him) ridiculous conversations, parties, amusements and so on. A man should have friends, of course ; and he devotes enough paragraphs to this matter to make a good-sized pamphlet. Yet, just the same, he was always disappointed in his. And to the end of his life, he thought of some sort of communication with another, or with others which would answer to him as Nature answered him, something effortless and unconscious.

As for marriage and family life, Thoreau himself thought that the highest life for a man meant doing without these. He was himself attached to his parents and relatives, but probably eschewed further responsibility because he feared that this would interfere with his work—his endless walks and solitary musings. And also, it is to be assumed, his independence of physical and material accompaniments. For, if he had married, his wife would have had to be contented with the little he wanted, yet if he wanted so little, why should she ? And as for children, and the responsibility of looking after them, he could not reconcile his ideas of himself as a philosopher, who had not succumbed

to the lures of ordinary life, with himself as a responsible family man. And yet, in others, he thought that first of all they should be good animals, and this involved children and housekeeping. He was always talking about Nature as a mother, and watching the foxes and the muskrats take care of their young. And no doubt if he had ever come across a philosopher muskrat who denied himself a burrow and a mate on his grounds, he would have been sympathetic. Nevertheless, he said definitely that the great things of human life were above and without sex and the material and social institutions ordinarily accepted.

Lastly, a man should follow his impulses. He should not ask advice, but let his inner needs stand for him as goals to be satisfied. Thoreau was very sure that a man could tell what these were and conduct himself accordingly. For these reasons he derided the conventional view of life, popular success and esteem, wealth, envying others what they had, adhering to the accepted ideas of right and wrong, the genteel viewpoint. He felt that only as individual men did men seem respectable. In the mass their worst and most destructive features were brought into prominence. In the mass of men, he could never detect the constructive and aesthetic genius which seemed so pervasive elsewhere in Nature.

For this reason, popular institutions were hateful to him—the newspapers, churches, magazines and public amusements seemed to him dull and destructive. Most of all, he appears to have wished that all men could see the falsity of these things, as he did, and do away with them, since to him these institutions stood for what will destroy men in the end. Education, even, was never a necessity for him. As long as a man could stand up with inner satisfaction—his conscious knowledge meant nothing. Education itself was more or less of a joke, and, as he observed it administered, could have no real value to anyone, would not help men to

live, but would rather only turn them into prejudiced observers. Even ignorance he admired, since he felt that the great knowledge of this world was the inherent property of each thing to its degree, according to its relation to the whole, and that it could never be known as the contents of a book are known, but rather felt, and so, unconsciously acted upon.

The most important thing for all men, and for each man, as he saw it, was to sweep aside all that has been imposed on him, unverified by his own existence, and so to live unprejudiced by socially evolved theories. More, he wanted men to be sensate, to be animals, to look on a world untainted by a system which guaranteed nothing for the supposed gainers or losers. It was for these reasons that he hated business, government and religion. To him they were deadly, poisonous to the kind of life he lived and idealized. He felt that no matter how high the principle an institution supposedly embodied, that if kept up for any length of time, it decayed, degraded, and became petty, narrow and sordid, and compared to the universe outside of it, and for which it was trying to make the law, positively criminal.

Nowadays we have certain theories about making human life a better thing. Boiled down to common understandable objects, they mean that we shall have and live a better material life, have more conveniences, benefit as a mass from the researches of science, and altogether lead a much easier life. Thoreau was opposed to such reforms. He did not believe in co-operation for such an end. He did not believe in the end. He believed that indeed, if the outward life could be reformed, the inward would be also, and that the material ease which would then prevail would have a counterpart of emotion. However, he felt that material reform would never be accomplished without an inward and individual reform first, and that

if this last were accomplished, then the former would be superfluous !

Thoreau opposed government by representation—mass government. According to him the right was not a mass question, but each man's question. The virtue of mass government was non-existent. Only the force of the mass was expressed in mass government, and this had little to do with each man's moral decision, which was a matter of intuition. A man who cared to leave his decisions to the mass did not care about what was right. As you can see, he rejected the principle of authoritarianism at every point, from religion to government. Nature, not man, was the great master, and man could scarcely speak for her.

Each man should work every day. Luxury and idleness meant death, that a man was not following his intuition in the matter. Physical work was what everyone should do. Each labourer should share in some creative enterprise. Thoreau despised the machine in which a man was reduced to turning a crank. Physical labour was not only a duty, but also it was the true method of refining thought, attaining that relaxed mood which made possible the higher life or communion with Nature. But not too much physical labour. Men should not work until they were exhausted. The world was too fruitful and luxuriant a place, and if each man followed the requirements of his body only, and not the meretricious ends set by society, a little work each day would give each man enough to live on. Thoreau looked with delight on the failure of business, on hard times, as these affected industry, and trade, and manufacturing and distributing. For these were just the institutions which he felt should be done away with, because they destroyed not only the men who owned them but those who were employed in them.

Also Thoreau had a very cold eye for virtues as we understand them. He felt that with our pity and our

charity we were destroying not only ourselves but those to whom we dealt them. They kept people who received them from doing what they could for themselves, based on their own qualifications, as to whether or not they should live, or eat or wear clothes. He felt that no one should beg, or give to beggars. Each should be his own man and not indebted to any for help. The giver was as bad as the receiver, for he became puffed up with an exaggerated sense of his own power, when, if he really questioned himself, he would have seen that he should never have had that which he can give away.

Finally, he also disregarded repentance, and taking thought for living a better life. Such virtues as doing good, and in fact the whole Christian system of obeisance to a personal God, was repugnant to him. And, as a matter of fact, repentance, as he says, takes away more than it gives from anyone, for all the virtue of doing wrong is expended in repenting instead of going on to something different, if not better. At the same time Thoreau himself was not unrepentant. He felt himself to be a bad man, knew himself for a mean one and called himself a selfish one. But he conceived of living where such reflections could not be. For again and again Thoreau returns to the unconscious, the affirmative, the unquestioning, the unknowable, as the higher place, the place where morals as we know them do not exist.

"Ah! I have penetrated to those meadows on the morning of many a first spring day, jumping from hummock to hummock, from willow root to willow root, when the wild river valley and woods were bathed in so pure and bright a light as would have waked the dead, if they had been slumbering in their graves, as some suppose. There needs no stronger proof of immortality. All things must live in such a light."

Thoreau never looked forward to a life that was easy,

harmonious on any minor scale, such as among men, devoid of pain, where what we call good should be the only state ; he liked struggles, fighting, war, any battle of a creature in its effort to save its highly personalized, highly individualized, instinctive life—such fights as were waged by musk-rats or beavers, or by John Brown. But he would have disapproved of and despised our recent world war as a commercial enterprise—or indeed, our whole mechanical warfare of to-day, based on social institutions which he would have despised *a priori*. But he would have rejoiced to see a contest between two Indian tribes for the possession of a hunting ground.

Theodore Dreiser has selected and arranged the essence  
of Thoreau's thought from

A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRI-  
MACK RIVERS

WALDEN

CAPE COD AND MISCELLANIES

FAMILIAR LETTERS

JOURNALS

*THE WORKS OF*

**HENRY DAVID THOREAU**

(1817-1862)

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

Walden, or, Life in the Woods

The Maine Woods

Cape Cod and Miscellanies

Excursions and Poems

Familiar Letters

Journals

## THE UNIVERSE

Not till we are lost--in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations.

Nature puts no questions and answers none which we mortals ask. She has long ago taken her resolution.

The improvements of ages have had but little influence on the essential laws of man's existence.

## PANTHEISM

### (a) *A man senses spirit*

I see, smell, taste, hear, feel that everlasting Something to which we are allied, at once our maker, our abode, our destiny, our very Selves ; the one historic truth, the most remarkable fact which can become the distinct and uninvited subject of our thought, the actual glory of the universe ; the only fact which a human being cannot avoid recognizing, or in some way forget or dispense with.

We need pray for no higher heaven than the pure senses can furnish, a *purely sensuous life*. Our present senses are but the rudiments of what they are destined to become. We are grateful when we are reminded by interior evidence of the permanence of universal laws. . . . This world is but a canvas to our imaginations . . . for certainly there is a life of the mind above the wants of the body, and independent of it.

With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions of their consequences , and all things, good and bad,

go by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in Nature. I may be either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it. I *may* be affected by a theatrical exhibition ; on the other hand, I *may not* be affected by an actual event which appears to concern me much more. I only know myself as a human entity ; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections ; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can be as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it ; and that is no more I than it is you.

We soon get through with Nature. She excites an expectation which she cannot satisfy . . . The red-bird which I saw . . . I thought but the outmost sentinel of the wild immortal camp, . . . that the deeper woods abounded with redder birds still ; but, now that I have threaded all our woods and waded the swamps, I have never yet met with his compeer, still less his wilder kindred. The red-bird which is the last of Nature is but the first of God. . . . We *condescend* to climb the crags of earth. It is our weary legs alone that praise them. That forest on whose skirts the red-bird flits is not of earth. I expected a fauna more infinite and various, birds of more dazzling colours and more celestial song.

I grow savager and savager every day, as if fed on raw meat, and my tameness is only the repose of untamableness. I dreamt of looking abroad summer and winter, with free gaze, from some mountainside, . . .—I to be Nature looking into Nature with such easy sympathy as the blue-eyed grass in the meadow looks in the face of the sky. . . . Now-a-nights I go on to the hill to see the sun set, as one would go home at evening ; the bustle of the village has run on all day, and left me quite in the rear ; but I see the sunset,

and find that it can wait for my slow virtue. But I forget that you think more of this human nature than of this Nature I praise. Why won't you believe that mine is more human than any single man or woman can be? that in it, in the sunset there, are all the qualities that can adorn a household, and that sometimes, in a fluttering leaf, one may hear all your Christianity preached.

In the wildest nature, there is not only the material of the most cultivated life, and a sort of anticipation of the last result, but a greater refinement already than is ever attained by man.

In my better hours I am conscious of the influx of a serene and unquestionable wisdom which partly unsuits, and if I yielded to it more rememberingly would wholly unfit me, for what is called the active business of life, for that furnishes nothing on which the eye of reason can rest. What is that other kind of life to which I am thus continually allured? which alone I love? Is it a life for this world? Can a man feed and clothe himself gloriously who keeps only the truth steadily before him? who calls in no evil to his aid? Are there duties which necessarily interfere with the serene perception of truth? Are our serene moments mere foretastes of heaven—joys gratuitously vouchsafed to us as a consolation—or simply a transient realization of what might be the whole tenor of our lives?

This, our respectable daily life, on which the man of common sense, the Englishman of the world, stands so squarely, and on which our institutions are founded, is in fact the veriest illusion, and will vanish like the baseless fabric of a vision; but that faint glimmer of reality which sometimes illuminates the darkness of daylight for all men, reveals something more solid and enduring than adamant, which is in fact the cornerstone of the world.

On the outside all the life of the earth is expressed in the animal or vegetable, but make a deep cut in it and you find

it vital ; you find in the very sands an anticipation of the vegetable leaf. No wonder, then, that plants grow and spring in it. The atoms have already learned the law. Let a vegetable sap convey it upwards and you have a vegetable leaf. No wonder that the earth expresses itself outwardly in leaves, which labours with the idea thus inwardly. The over-hanging leaf sees here its prototype. The earth is pregnant with law.

(b) *Form in Nature*

Nature will bear the closest inspection. She invites us to lay our eyes level with her smallest leaf, and take an insect view of its plain. A field of water betrays the spirit that is in the air. It has new life and motion. It is intermediate between land and sky. On land, only the grass and trees wave, but the water itself is *rippled* by the wind. I see the breeze dash over it in streaks and flakes of light . . . We shall look down on the surface of air next, and mark where a still subtler spirit sweeps over it. Water and sand also assume this same form under the influence of wind. And I have seen, on the surface of the Walden ice, great sweeping, waving lines, somewhat like these. It is the track of the wind, the impress which it makes on flowing materials.

A dirty or greyish-brown foam . . . lies sometimes several feet wide, quite motionless on the surface of the shallow water above the ice, and is very agreeable and richly figured, like the hide of some strange beast—how cheap these colours in nature !—parts of it very much like the fur of rabbits, the tips of their tails. I stooped to pick it up once or twice—now like bowels overlying one another, now like tripe, now like flames, *i.e.* in form, with the free, bold touch of Nature. One would not believe that the impurities which thus colour the foam could be arranged in such pleasing forms. Given any material, and Nature begins to work it up into pleasing forms.

Very little evidence of God or man did I see just then, and life not as rich and inviting an enterprise as it should be, when my attention was caught by a snowflake on my coat-sleeve. It was one of those perfect, crystalline, star-shaped ones, six-rayed, like a flat wheel with six spokes, only the spokes were perfect little pine trees in shape, arranged around a central spangle. This little object, which, with many of its fellows, rested unmelted on my coat, so perfect and beautiful, reminded me that Nature had not lost her pristine vigour yet, and why should man lose heart? . . . We are rained and snowed on with gems. I confess that I was a little encouraged, for I was beginning to believe that Nature was poor and mean, and I was now convinced that she turned off as good a work as ever. What a world we live in! Where are the jewellers' shops? There is nothing handsomer than a snowflake and a dewdrop. We think that the one mechanically coheres and the other simply flows together and falls, but in truth they are the product of *enthusiasm*, the children of an ecstasy, finished with the artist's utmost skill.

### (c) *Mind in Nature*

We can never have enough of Nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigour, vast and titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thundercloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander. To my senses the dicksonia fern has the most wild and primitive fragrance, quite unalloyed and untamable, such as no human institutions give out—the early morning fragrance of the world, antediluvian, strength and hope imparting. They who scent it can never faint. . . . Nature, the earth herself, is the only panacea.

How swift Nature is to repair the damage that man does ! When he has cut down a tree and left only a white-topped and bleeding stump, she comes at once to the rescue with her chemistry, and covers it decently with a fresh coat of grey, and in the course of time she adds a thick coat of green cup and bright cockscomb lichens, and it becomes an object of new interest to the lover of Nature ! Suppose it were always to remain a raw stump instead ! It becomes a shell on which this humble vegetation spreads and displays itself, and we forget the death of the larger in the life of the less.

The earth I tread on is not a dead, inert mass. It is a body, has a spirit, is organic . . . . There is no end to the fine bowels here exhibited—heaps of liver, lights, and bowels. Have you no bowels ? Nature has some bowels. And there again she is the mother of humanity. When seeds are put into it, they germinate ; when turtles' eggs, they hatch in due time. Though the mother turtle remained and brooded them, it would still nevertheless be the universal world turtle which, through her, cared for them as now. Thus the earth is the mother of all creatures.

Nature does her best to feed man. . . . We pluck and eat in remembrance of Her. It is a sacrament, a communion. Our bread need not ever be sour or hard to digest. What Nature is to the mind she is also to the body. As she feeds my imagination, she will feed my body ; for what she says she means, and is ready to do. She is not simply beautiful to the poet's eye. Not only the rainbow and sunset are beautiful, but to be fed and clothed, sheltered and warmed aright, are equally beautiful and inspiring. There is not necessarily any gross and ugly fact which may not be eradicated from the life of man. We should endeavour practically in our lives to correct all the defects which our imagination detects.

As a mother loves to see her child imbibe nourishment and expand, so God loves to see his children thrive on the

nutriment he has furnished them. . . . Just as simply as the crow picks up the worms which all over the fields have been washed out by the thaw, these men pick up the musquash that have been washed out of the banks. And to serve such ends men plough and sail, and powder and shot are made, and the grocer exists to retail them, though he may think himself much more the deacon of some church. . . . What care I to see galleries full of representatives of heathen gods, when I can see natural living ones by an infinitely superior artist, without perspective tube?

(d) *Man is related to all of Nature*

. . . not till we are lost do we begin to realize the infinite extent of our relations. We are related to all Nature, animate and inanimate, and accordingly we share to some extent the nature of the dormant creatures.

Dear to me to lie in, this sand; fit to preserve the bones of a race for thousands of years to come. And this is my home, my native soil. . . . Of thee, O earth, are my bone and sinew made, to thee, O sun, am I brother . . . To this dust my body will gladly return as to its origin. Here have I my habitat. I am of thee.

God did not make this world in jest; no, nor in indifference. These migrating sparrows all bear messages that concern my life. I do not pluck the fruits in their season. I love the birds and beasts because they are mythologically in earnest. I see that the sparrow cheeps and flits and sings adequately to the great design of the universe; that man does not communicate with it, understand its language, because he is not at one with Nature. I reproach myself because I have regarded with indifference the passage of the birds; I have thought them no better than I.

I cannot but see still in my mind's eye those little striped breams poised in Walden's glaucous water . . . in my

account of this bream I cannot go a hair's breadth beyond the mere statement that it exists—the miracle of its existence, my contemporary and neighbour, yet so different from me ! I can only poise my thought there by its side and try to think like a bream for a moment. I can only think of precious jewels, of music, poetry, beauty, and the mystery of life. I only see the bream in its orbit, as I see a star, but I care not to measure its distance or weight. The bream, appreciated, floats in the pond as the centre of the system, another image of God. Its life no man can explain more than he can his own. . . . I have a contemporary in Walden. It has fins where I have legs and arms. I have a friend among the fishes, at least a new acquaintance. Its character will interest me, I trust, not its clothes and anatomy. I do not want it to eat. It is as if a poet or anchorite had moved into the town, whom I can see from time to time and think of yet oftener.

You must ascend a mountain to learn your relation to matter, and so to your own body, for *it* is at home there, though *you* are not. It might have been composed there, and will have no farther to go to return to dust there, than in your garden ; but your spirit inevitably comes away, and brings your body with it, if it lives.

See how I can play with my fingers ! They are the funniest companions I have ever found Where did they come from ? What strange control I have over them ! *Who am I ?* What are they ?—those little peaks—call them Madison, Jefferson, Lafayette. What is *the matter* ? My fingers, do I say ? Why, ere long, they may form the top-most crystal of Mount Washington. I go up there to see my body's cousins. There are some fingers, toes, bowels, etc., that I take an interest in, and therefore I am interested in all their relations.

The seasons and all their changes are in me. I see not a dead eel or floating snake, or a null, but it rounds my life

and is like a line or accent in its poem. Almost I believe the Concord would not rise and overflow its banks again, were I not here. After a while I learn what my moods and seasons are. I would have nothing subtracted. I can imagine nothing added. My moods are thus periodical, not two days in my year alike. The perfect correspondence of Nature to man, so that he is at home in her!

This earth which is spread out like a map around me is but the lining of my inmost soul exposed. In me is the sucker that I see. No wholly extraneous object can compel me to recognize it. I am guilty of suckers.

God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us. The universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions; whether we travel fast or slow, the track is laid for us. Let us spend our lives in conceiving them. Each humblest plant, or weed . . . stands there to express some thought or mood of ours, and yet how long it stands in vain!

We are one virtue, one truth, one beauty. All Nature is our satellite, whose light is dull and reflected. She is subaltern to us—an episode to our poem; but we are primary, and radiate light and heat to the system.

#### (e) *Time*

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but Eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars.

Again, rivers appear to have travelled back and worn into the meadows of their creating, and then they became

more meandering than ever. Thus in the course of ages the rivers wriggle in their beds, till it feels comfortable under them. Time is cheap and rather insignificant. It matters not whether it is a river which changes from side to side in a geological period or an eel that wriggles past in an instant.

Is the babe young? When I behold it, it seems more venerable than the oldest man; . . . and bears the wrinkles of Father Saturn himself. . . . The earth is covered with mould. I thrust this stick many aeons deep into its surface, and with my heel make a deeper furrow than the elements have ploughed here for a thousand years. If I listen, I hear the peep of frogs which is older than the slime of Egypt, and the distant drumming of a partridge on a log, as if it were the pulsebeat of the summer air. . . . The newest is but the oldest made visible to our senses

(f) *It is a universe of change according to universal laws*

All change is a miracle to contemplate, but it is a miracle which is taking place unobserved every instant; when all is ready it takes place, and only a miracle could stay it.

It will be perceived that there are two kinds of change—that of the race, and that of the individual within the limits of the former.

Things do not change; we change. Is not the world forever beginning and coming to an end, both to men and races?

It is the discovery of science that stupendous changes in the earth's surface, such as are referred to the Deluge, for instance, are the results of causes still in operation, which have been at work for an incalculable period. There has not been a sudden re-formation, or, as it were, new creation of the world, but a steady progress according to existing laws.

We find ourselves in a world that is already planted, but is also still being planted as at first. We say of some plants

that they grow in wet places and of others that they grow in desert places. The truth is that their seeds are scattered almost everywhere, but here only do they succeed. . . . The development theory implies a great vital force in Nature, because it is more flexible and accommodating, and equivalent to a sort of constant *new* creation.

(g) *Man does not need to know his origin and destiny*

Swedenborg . . . comes nearer to answering, or attempting to answer, literally, your questions concerning man's origin, purpose, and destiny, than any of the worthies

. But I think that that is not *altogether* a recommendation: since such an answer to these questions cannot be discovered any more than perpetual motion, for which no reward is now offered. The noblest man it is . . . that knows, and by his life suggests, the most about these things. Crack away at these nuts, however, as long as you can—the very exercise will ennable you, and you may get something better than the answer you expect.

After a still winter night I awoke with the impression that some question had been put to me, which I had been endeavouring in vain to answer in my sleep, as what—how—when—where? But there was dawning Nature, in whom all creatures live, looking in at my broad windows with serene and satisfied face, and no question on *her* lips.

The unconsciousness of a man is the consciousness of God, the end of the world

(h) *The Universe sings a song*

There is always a kind of fine æolian harp music to be heard in the air. I hear now, as it were, the mellow sound of distant horns in the hollow mansions of the upper air, a sound to make all men divinely insane that hear it, far

away overhead, subsiding into my ear. To ears that are expanded what a harp this world is ! The occupied ear thinks that beyond the cricket no sound can be heard, but there is an immortal melody that may be heard morning, noon and night, by ears that can attend, and from time to time this man or that hears it, having ears that were made for music. To hear this the hard-hack and the meadow-sweet *aspire*. They are thus beautifully painted, because they are tinged in the lower stratum of that melody.

There was a time when the beauty and the music were all within, and I sat and listened to my thoughts. . . . I sat for hours on rocks and wrestled with the melody which possessed me. . . . You sat on the earth as on a raft, listening to music that was not of the earth, but which ruled and arranged it. Man *should be* the harp articulate.

Men talk about Bible miracles because there is no miracle in their lives. Cease to gnaw that crust. There is ripe fruit over your head. I doubt if men do ever simply and naturally glorify God in the ordinary sense, but it is remarkable how sincerely in all ages they glorify Nature. The praising of Aurora, for instance, under some form in all ages is obedience to as irresistible an instinct as that which impels the frogs to peep. (Though man's life is trivial and handselled, Nature is holy and heroic. With what infinite faith and promise and moderation begins each new day ! It is only a little after three o'clock, and already there is evidence of morning in the sky.

There is nothing more affecting and beautiful to man, a child of the earth, than the sight of the naked soil in the spring. I feel a kindredship with it. Oh, if I could be intoxicated on air and water ! on hope and memory ! and always see the maples standing red in the midst of the waters on the meadow ! I do not think that man can understand the *importance* of man's existence, its bearing on the other phenomena of life, until it shall become a remembrance to

him the survivor that such a being or such a race once existed on the earth. Imagine yourself alone in the world, a musing, wondering, reflecting spirit, *lost* in thought, and imagine thereafter the creation of man!—man made in the image of God!

The winds which passed over my dwelling were such as sweep over the ridges of mountains, bearing the broken strains, or celestial parts only, of terrestrial music. The morning wind forever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted; but few are the ears that hear it. Olympus is but the outside of the earth everywhere,

Genius is inspired by its own works; it is hermaphroditic. That ancient universe is in such capital health, I think undoubtedly it will never die. Heal yourselves, doctors; by God, I live.

## KNOWLEDGE

### (a) *Truth and Error—Knowledge and Ignorance*

All perception of truth is the detection of an analogy; we reason from our hands to our head. Truth has properly no opponent, for nothing gets so far up on the other side as to be opposite. She looks broadcast over the field and sees no opponent. Truth is such by reference to the heart of man within, not to any standard without. There is no creed so false but faith can make it true. As if any sincere thought were not the best sort of truth! . . . If I were to compile a volume to contain the condensed wisdom of mankind, I should quote no rhythmless line. The only way to speak the truth is to speak lovingly; only the lover's words are heard. The intellect should never speak; it is not a natural sound.

. . . What is most of our boasted so-called knowledge but a conceit that we know something, which robs us of

the advantages of our actual ignorance. For a man's ignorance sometimes is not only useful but beautiful, while his knowledge is oftentimes worse than useless, besides being ugly. In reference to important things, whose knowledge amounts to more than a consciousness of his ignorance? Yet what more refreshing and inspiring knowledge than this?

Some minds are as little logical or argumentative as Nature; they can offer no reason or "guess," but they exhibit the solemn and incontrovertible fact. . . . Their silent and practical logic convinces the reason and the understanding at the same time. Of such sort is always the only pertinent question and the only satisfactory reply. There is a chasm between knowledge and ignorance which the arches of science can never span.

The knowledge of an unlearned man is living and luxuriant like a forest, but covered with mosses and lichens, and for the most part inaccessible and going to waste; the knowledge of the man of science is like timber collected in yards for public works, which still supports a green sprout here and there, but even this is liable to dry rot.

I do not know where to find in any literature, whether ancient or modern, any adequate account of that Nature with which I am acquainted. Mythology comes nearest to it, of any. As for books and the adequateness of their . . . truth, they are as the tower of Babel to the sky.

Man can only tell his relation to truth, but render no account of truth to herself.

### (b) *The Source of Knowledge*

The intellect of most men is barren. They neither fertilize nor are fertilized. It is the marriage of the soul with Nature that makes the intellect fruitful, that gives birth to imagination . . . some grains of fertilizing pollen, floating

in the air, fall on us, and suddenly the sky is all one rainbow, is full of music and fragrance and flavour. . . . Only thought which is expressed by the mind in repose—as it were, lying on its back and contemplating the heavens—is adequately and fully expressed. What are sidelong, transient, passing half-views? . . . Knowledge does not come to us by details but by *Lieferungen* from the gods.

The most valuable thoughts which I entertain are anything but what *I* thought. Nature abhors a vacuum, and if I can only walk with sufficient carelessness I am sure to be filled.

. . . The roots of *letters* are *things*. Natural objects and phenomena are the original symbols or type which express our thoughts and feelings. . . . The most clear and ethereal ideas readily ally themselves to the earth, to the primal womb of things. They put forth roots as soon as branches; they are eager to be *soiled*. No idea is so soaring but it will readily put forth roots. Also there are parasitic plants which have their roots in the branches or roots of other trees, as the mistletoe, the beechdrops, etc. There are minds which so have their roots in other minds as in the womb of Nature—if, indeed, most are not such!

### (c) *Method of Knowing*

There is no such thing as pure *objective* observation. Your observation, to be interesting, i.e. to be significant, must be *subjective*. The sum of what the writer . . . has to report is simply some human experience, whether he be poet or philosopher or man of science. . . . Every important worker will report what life there is in him.

A man thinks as well through his legs and arms as his brain. We exaggerate the importance and exclusiveness of the headquarters. Do you suppose they were a race of

consumptives and dyspeptics who invented Grecian mythology and poetry?

New ideas come into this world somewhat like falling meteors, with a flash and an explosion, and perhaps somebody's castle-roof perforated. To try to polish the stone in its descent, to give it a peculiar turn, and make it whistle a tune, perchance, would be of no use, if it were possible. Your polished stuff turns out not to be meteoric, but of the earth. Ideas that soar above the earth cannot be seen all round, but ever have one side turned towards the heavens.

In your mind must be a liquor which will dissolve the world whenever it is dropped in it. There is no universal solvent but this, and all things together cannot saturate it. It will hold the universe in solution, and yet be as translucent as ever. The vast machine may indeed roll over our toes, and we not know it, but it would rebound and be staved to pieces like an empty barrel, if it should strike fair and square on the smallest and least angular of a man's thoughts.

How is any scientific discovery made? Why, the discoverer takes it into his head first. He must all but see it. In the case of the most interesting plants which I have discovered in this vicinity, I have anticipated finding them perhaps a year before the discovery. . . you may suspect a thousand things, but I well know that that which you suspect most confidently of all, is just the truth. Your other doubts but flavour this main suspicion; they are the condiments which, taken alone, do simply bite the tongue.

The greatest gains and values are farthest from being appreciated. We easily come to doubt if they exist. We soon forget them. They are the highest reality. Perhaps the facts most astounding and most real are never communicated by man to man. The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched. My

loftiest thought is somewhat like an eagle that suddenly comes into the field of view, suggesting great things and thrilling the beholder, as if it were bound hitherward with a message for me ; but it comes no nearer, but circles and soars away, growing dimmer, disappointing me, till it is lost behind a cliff or a cloud. . . .

I am surprised that my affirmations or utterances come to me ready-made—not fore-thought—so that I occasionally let fall ripe a statement which I had never considered before. . . . As if we only thought by sympathy with the universal mind, which thought while we were asleep. There is such a necessity to make a definite statement that our minds at length do it without our consciousness, just as we carry our food to our mouths. We hear and apprehend only what we already half know . . . Every man thus *tracks himself* through life, in all his hearing and reading and observation and travelling . . . By and by we may be ready to receive what we cannot receive now. Some incidents in my life . . . have been like myths or passages in a myth, rather than mere incidents of history which have to wait to become significant. Quite in harmony with my subjective philosophy.

This, for instance · that, when I thought I knew the flowers so well, the beautiful purple azalea or pinxter-flower should be shown me by the hunter who found it. They are all just such events as my imagination prepares me for, no matter how incredible. . . . Ever and anon something will occur which my philosophy has not dreamed of. . . . That which had seemed a rigid wall of vast thickness unexpectedly proves a thin and undulating drapery.

Whatever of past or present wisdom has published itself to the world, is palpable falsehood till it come and utter itself by my side. As you see, so at length will you say. When facts are seen superficially, they are seen as they

lie in relation to certain institutions, perchance But I would have them expressed as more deeply seen, with deeper references, so that the reader or hearer cannot recognize them or apprehend their significance from the platform of common life, but it will be necessary that he be in a sense translated in order to understand them, when the truth respecting his things shall naturally exhale from a man like the odour of the muskrat from the coat of the trapper At first blush a man is not capable of reporting truth, he must be drenched and saturated with it first What was *enthusiasm* in the young man must become *temperament* in the mature man Without excitement, heat or passion, he will survey the world which excited the youth and threw him off his balance A fact truly and absolutely stated is taken out of the region of common sense and acquires a mythologic or universal significance

(d) *The Limitations of Knowledge*

It seems to me that we are the mere creatures of thought—one of the lowest forms of intellectual life, we men—as the sunfish is of animal life As yet our thoughts have acquired no definiteness nor solidity, they are purely molluscous, not vertebrate, and the height of our existence is to float upward in an ocean where the sun shines—appearing only like a vast soup or chowder to the eyes of the immortal navigators

The universe will not wait to be explained Whoever seriously attempts a theory of it is already behind his age His yea has reserved no nay for the morrow. . . The wisest solution is no better than dissolution When I look at the stars, nothing which the astronomers have said attaches to them, they are so simple and remote Their knowledge is felt to be all terrestrial and to concern the

earth alone. It suggests that the same is the case with every object, however familiar; our so-called knowledge of it is equally vulgar and remote.

The mystery of the life of plants is kindred with that of our own lives, and the physiologist must not presume to explain their growth according to mechanical laws, or as he might explain some machinery of his own making. We must not expect to probe with our fingers the sanctuary of any life, whether animal or vegetable. If we do, we shall discover nothing but surface still. The ultimate expression or fruit of any created thing is a fine effluvium which only the most ingenuous worshipper perceives at a reverent distance from its surface even. The cause and the effect are equally evanescent and intangible, and the former must be investigated in the same spirit and with the same reverence, with which the latter is perceived. . . Shall we presume to alter the angle at which God chooses to be worshipped? The gods can never afford to leave a man in the world who is privy to any of their secrets. They cannot have a spy here. They will at once send him packing. How can you walk on ground when you see through it? The very sod is replete with mechanism far finer than that of a watch, and yet it is cast under our feet to be trampled on. The process that goes on in the sod and the dark, about the minute fibres of the grass—the chemistry and the mechanics—before a single green blade can appear above the withered herbage, if it could be adequately described, would supplant all other revelations. . . we cannot know what we are not.

We believe that the possibility of the future far exceeds the accomplishment of the past. We review the past with the common sense, but we anticipate the future with transcendental senses. In our sanest moments we find ourselves naturally expecting or prepared for far greater changes than any which we have experienced within the

period of distinct memory, only to be paralleled by experiences which are forgotten. Perchance there are revolutions which create an interval impassable to the memory. . . . We affirm that all things are possible, but only these things have been to our knowledge. I do not even infer the future *from what I know of the past*. I am hardly better acquainted with the past than with the future. What is new to the individual may be familiar to the experience of his race. It must be rare indeed that the experience of the individual transcends that of his race.

We are accustomed to say that the common sense of this age belonged to the seer of the last—as if time gave him any vantage ground. But not so! I see not but Genius must ever take an equal start, and all the generations of men are virtually at a stand-still for it to come and consider of them. Common sense is not so familiar with any truth, but Genius will represent it in a strange light to it. I do not know that knowledge amounts to anything more definite than a novel and grand surprise, or a sudden revelation of the insufficiency of all that we had called knowledge before; an indefinite sense of the grandeur and glory of the universe. It is the lighting up of the mist by the sun. But man cannot be said to know in any higher sense, any more than he can look serenely and with impunity in the face of the sun.

#### (e) *Science*

All Science is only a makeshift, a means to an end which is never attained . . . all description is postponed till we know the whole, but then science itself will be cast aside. But unconsidered expressions of our delight which any natural object draws from us are things complete and final in themselves, since all nature is to be regarded as it concerns

inan, and who knows how near to absolute truth such unconscious affirmations may come? Which are the truest, the sublime conceptions of Hebrew poets and *seers*, or the guarded statements of modern geologists, which we must modify or unlearn so fast?

I do not get nearer by a hair's breadth to any natural object so long as I presume that I have an introduction to it from some learned man. To conceive of it with a total apprehension I must for the thousandth time approach it as something totally strange. If you would make acquaintance with the ferns you must forget your botany. . . Not a single scientific term or distinction is the least to the purpose, for you would fain perceive something, and you must approach the object totally unprejudiced. You must be aware that *no thing* is what you have taken it to be. . . Your greatest success will be simply to perceive that such things are, and you will have no communication to make to the Royal Society.

In the true natural order the order or system is not insisted on. Each is first, and each last. That which presents itself to us this moment occupies the whole of the present and rests on the very topmost point of the sphere, under the zenith. The species and individuals of all the natural kingdoms ask our attention and admiration in a round robin. We make straight lines, putting a captain at their head and a lieutenant at their tails, with sergeants and corporals all along the line and a flourish of trumpets near the beginning, insisting on a particular uniformity where Nature has made curves to which belongs their own sphere-music. It is indispensable for us to square her circles, and we offer our rewards to him who will do it.

If you have undertaken to write the biography of an animal, you will have to present to us the living creature, *i.e.* a result which no man can understand, but only in his

degree report the impression made on him . . . Surely the most important part of an animal is its *anima*, its vital spirit, on which is based its character, and all the peculiarities by which it most concerns us Yet most scientific books which treat of animals leave this out altogether, and what they describe are as it were phenomena of dead matter What is most interesting in a dog, for example, is his attachment to his master, his intelligence, courage and the like, and not his anatomical structure or even many habits which affect us less

Man cannot afford to be a naturalist, to look at Nature directly, but only with the side of his eye He must look through and beyond her To look at her is fatal as to look at the head of Medusa It turns the man of science to stone. I feel that I am dissipated by so many observations I should be the magnet in the midst of all this dust and filings. I knock the back of my hand against a rock, and as I smooth back the skin, I find myself prepared to study lichens there. Things seen with a microscope begin to be insignificant So described, they are as monstrous as if they should be magnified to a thousand diameters Suppose I should see and describe men and houses and trees and birds as if they were a thousand times larger than they are ! Without prying instruments we disturb the balance and harmony of nature

Our science, so called, is always more barren and mixed up with error than our sympathies are The old naturalists were so sensitive and sympathetic to Nature that they could be surprised by the ordinary events of life It was an incessant miracle to them, and therefore gorgons and flying dragons were not incredible to them The greatest and saddest defect is not credulity, but our habitual forgetfulness that our science is ignorance With all your science can you tell how it is, and whence it is, that light comes into the soul ?

How novel and original must be each new man's view of the universe ! for though the world is so old, and so many books have been written, each object appears wholly undescribed to our experience, each field of thought wholly unexplored. . . . The sun climbs to the zenith daily, high above all literature and science. Astronomy, even, concerns us worldlings only, but the sun of poetry and of each new child born into the planet has never been astronomized, nor brought nearer by a telescope. So it will be to the end of time. . . . Science is young by the ruins of Luxor, unearthing the Sphinx, or Nineveh, or between the Pyramids.

Science is always brave, for to know is to know good

(f) *Education*

The expression "a *liberal education*" originally meant one worthy of freemen. Such is education simply in a true and broad sense. But education ordinarily so called—the learning of trades and professions which is designed to enable men to earn their living, or to fit them for a particular station in life—is *servile*.

How vain to try to teach youth, or anybody, truths ! They can only learn them after their own fashion, and when they get ready . . . A hundred boys at college are drilled in physics and metaphysics, languages, etc. There *may* be one or two in each hundred, prematurely old perchance, who approaches the subject from a similar point of view to his teachers, but as for the rest, and the most promising, it is like agricultural chemistry, to so many Indians . They get a valuable drilling, it *may* be, but they do not learn what you profess to teach. They at most only learn where the arsenal is, in case they should ever want to use any of its weapons. The young men, being young, necessarily listen to the lecturer in history, just as they do

to the singing of a bird. They expect to be affected by something he may say. It is a kind of poetic pabulum and imagery that they get. Nothing comes quite amiss to their mill.

It is remarkable that the highest intellectual mood which the world tolerates is the perception of the truth of the most ancient revelations, now in some respects out of date; but any direct revelation, any original thoughts, it hates like virtue. The fathers and the mothers of the town would rather hear the young man or young woman at their tables express reverence for some old statement of the truth than utter a direct revelation themselves. They don't want to have any prophets born into their families—damn them!

We check and repress the divinity that stirs within us, to fall down and worship the divinity that is dead without us. It appears to me that, to one standing on the heights of philosophy, mankind and the works of man will have sunk out of sight altogether, that man is altogether too much insisted on.

The poet says the proper study of mankind is man. I say, study to forget all that, take wider views of the universe. That is the egotism of the race. What is this our childish, gossiping, social literature, mainly in the hands of the publishers? When another poet says the world is too much with us, he means, of course, that man is too much with us. In the propounded views of man, in institutions, in the common sense, there is narrowness and delusion.

I have yet to hear the first syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from my seniors. There is life, an experiment untried by me, and it does not avail me that you have tried it. If I have any valuable experience, I am sure to reflect that this my mentors said nothing about. What were mysteries to the child remain mysteries to the old man. One may almost doubt if the wisest man has learned anything of absolute value by living.

(g) *The Wise Man*

How can a man be a wise man, if he doesn't know any better how to live than other men?—if he is only more cunning and intellectually subtle? . . . Does Wisdom fail? or does she teach how to succeed by her example? Is she merely the miller who grinds the finest logic? Did Plato get his *living* in a better way or more successfully than his contemporaries? Did he succumb to the difficulties of life like other men? Did he merely prevail over them by indifference, or by assuming grand airs? or find it easier to live because his aunt remembered him in her will?

Why should the scholar make a constant complaint that his fate is specially hard? We are too often told of "the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties"—how poets depend on patrons and starve in garrets, or at last go mad and die . . . Why should not the scholar, if he is really wiser than the multitude, do coarse work now and then? Why not let his greater wisdom enable him to do without things? If you say the wise man is unlucky, how could you distinguish him from the foolishly unfortunate?

This is not a noble method of learning, to be educated by inevitable suffering, like De Quincey, for instance. Better dive like a muskrat into the mud, and pile up a few weeds to sit on during the floods, a foundation of your own laying, a house of your own building, however cold and cheerless.

It appears to me that the wisest philosophers that I know are as foolish as Sancho Panza dreaming of his Island. Considering the ends they propose and the obstructions in their path, they are even One philosopher is feeble enough alone, but observe how each multiplies his difficulties—by how many unnecessary links he allies himself to the existing state of things. He girds himself for his enterprise with

*fasting and prayer, and then, instead of pressing forward like a light-armed soldier, with the fewest possible hindrances, he at once hooks himself on to some immovable institution, as a family, the very rottenest of them all, and begins to sing and scratch gravel towards his objects Why, it is as much as the strongest man can do decently to bury his friends and relations without making a new world of it But, if the philosopher is as foolish as Sancho Panza, he is also as wise, and nothing so truly makes a thing so as thinking it so*

A simple and independent mind does not toil at the bidding of any prince Genius is not a retainer to any emperor, nor is its material silver, or gold, or marble, except to a trifling extent A thinker's weight is in his thought, not in his tread ; when he thinks freely, his body weighs nothing He cannot tread down your grass, farmers.

A wise man will not go out of his way for information He might as well go out of nature, or commit suicide He who can deal with his thoughts as a material, building them into poems in which future generations will delight, he is the man of the greatest and rarest vigour, not sturdy diggers and lusty polygamists He is the man of energy, in whom subtle and poetic thoughts are bred How many are free to think ? free from fear, from perturbation, from prejudice ? Nine hundred and ninety-nine in a thousand are perfect slaves How many exercise the highest human faculties ? You conquer fate by thought If you think the fatal thought of men and institutions, you need never pull the trigger The consequences of thinking inevitably follow There is no more Herculean task than to think a thought about this life and then get it expressed

## PROBLEM OF MORALS

(a) *Intuition is the basis of moral goodness*

Any man knows when he is justified, and not all the wits in the world can enlighten him on that point. If one hesitates in his path, let him not proceed. Let him respect his doubts, for doubts, too, may have some divinity in them. That we have but little faith is not sad, but that we have but little faithfulness. By faithfulness faith is earned. When, in the progress of a life, a man swerves, though only by an angle infinitely small, from his proper and allotted path (and this is never done quite unconsciously even at first, in fact, that was his broad and scarlet sin—ah, he knew of it more than he can tell) then the drama of his life turns to tragedy, and makes haste to its fifth act. When once we thus fall behind ourselves, there is no accounting for the obstacles which rise up in our path, and no one is so wise as to advise, and no one so powerful as to aid us while we abide on that ground. Such are cursed with *duties*, and the *neglect of their duties*. For such the decalogue was made, and other far more voluminous and terrible codes. Action from principle, the perception and the performance of right, changes things and relations.

(b) *We sense evil and do evil things inevitably*

In my experience, at least of late years, all that depresses a man's spirits is the sense of remissness—duties neglected, unfaithfulness—or shamming, impurity, falsehood, selfishness, inhumanity, and the like. How awful is the least unquestionable meanness, when we cannot deny that we have been guilty of it. There seem to be no bounds to our unworthiness.

I know of no rule which holds so true as that we are always paid for our suspicion by finding what we suspect.

There can be no fairer recompense than this. Our suspicions exercise a demoniacal power over the subject of them. By some obscure law of influence, when we are perhaps unconsciously the subject of another's suspicion, we feel a strong impulse, even when it is contrary to our nature, to do that which he expects but reprobates.

The lover learns at last that there is no person quite transparent and trustworthy, but every one has a devil in him that is capable of any crime in the long run. Some, being offended, think sharp and satirical things, which yet they are not prepared consciously to utter. But in some unguarded moment these things escape from them, when they are as it were unconscious. They betray their thoughts, as it were by talking in their sleep, for the truth will out, under whatever veil of civility.

Faults are not the less faults because they are invariably balanced by corresponding virtues . . . I have never known one who could bear criticism, who could not be flattered, who would not bribe his judge, or was content that the truth should be loved always better than himself.

What is morality but immemorial custom ? It is not manner but character, and the conservative conscience sustains it.

We accuse savages of worshipping only the bad spirit, or devil, though they may distinguish both a good and a bad ; but they regard only that one which they fear and worship the devil only. We too are savages in this, doing precisely the same thing . . . We are not chiefly interested in birds and insects, for example, as they are ornamental and cheering to man, but we spare the lives of the former only on condition that they eat more grubs than they do cherries, and the only account of the insects which the State encourages is of the "Insects *Injurious to Vegetation*" We too admit both a good and a bad spirit, but we worship chiefly the bad spirit, whom we fear.

(William James) He charges society with all the crime committed, and praises the criminal for committing it. But I think that all the remedies he suggests out of his head—for he goes no farther, hearty as he is—would leave us about where we are now. For, of course, it is not by a gift of turkeys on Thanksgiving Day that he proposes to convert the criminal, but by a true sympathy with each one—with him, among the rest, who lyingly tells the world from the gallows that he has never been treated kindly by a single mortal since he was born. But it is not so easy a thing to sympathize with another, though you may have the best disposition to do it. There is Dobson over the hill. Have not you and I and all the world been trying, ever since he was born, to sympathize with him? (as doubtless he with us), and yet we have got no farther than to send him to the house of correction once at least; and he, on the other hand, as I hear, has sent us to another place several times. This is the real state of things, as I understand it, at least so far as James' remedies go. We are now, alas! exercising what charity we actually have, and new laws would not give us any more. But, perchance, we might make some improvements in the house of correction.

If you read the Rig Veda, oldest of books, as it were, describing a very primitive people and condition of things, you hear in their prayers of a still older, more primitive and aboriginal race in their midst and round about, warring on them and seizing their flocks and herds, infesting their pastures. Thus is it in another sense in all communities, and hence the prisons and police.

(c) *Perhaps human evil can be partly absolved in Nature*

I rejoice that there are owls. Let them do the idiotic and maniacal hooting for men. It is a sound admirably suited to swamps and twilight woods which no day

illustrates, suggesting a vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognized. They represent the stark twilight and unsatisfied thoughts which all have. These Italian boys with their hand-organs remind me of the keepers of wild beasts in menageries, whose whole art consists in stirring up their beasts from time to time with a pole. I am reminded of bright flowers and glancing birds and striped pards of the jungle ; these delicious harmonies tear me to pieces while they charm me. The tiger's musical smile.

(d) *Repentance is not good*

One cannot too soon forget his errors and misdemeanours ; for [to] dwell long upon them is to add to the offence, and repentance and sorrow can only be displaced by somewhat better, and which is as free and original as if they had not been. Not to grieve long for any action, but to go immediately and do freshly and otherwise, subtracts so much from the wrong. Else we make the delay of repentance the punishment of the sin. But a great Nature will not consider its sins as its own, but be more absorbed in the prospect of that valour and virtue for the future which is more properly it, than in these improper actions which, by being sins, discover themselves to be not it. Repentance is not a free and fair highway to God. A wise man will dispense with repentance. It is shocking and passionate. God prefers that you approach him thoughtful, not penitent, though you are the chief of sinners. It is only by forgetting yourself that you draw near to him. The punishment of sin is not positive, as is the reward of virtue.

It is not by a compromise, it is not by a timid and feeble repentance, that a man will save his soul and *live*, at last. He has got to *conquer* a clear field, letting Repentance & Co. go. That's a well-meaning but weak firm that has assumed the debts of an old and worthless one. You are to fight

in a field where no allowances will be made, no courteous bowing to one-handed knights You are expected to do your duty, not in spite of everything but *one*, but in spite of *everything*.

(c) *Innocence is good*

An innocent child is a man who has repented once for all, and is born again—has entered into the joy of his Lord. This shall be the test of innocence—if I can hear a taunt, and look out on the friendly moon, pacing the heavens in queen-like majesty, with the accustomed yearning.

(f) *Real goodness is not conscious but unconscious and beyond the reach of effort*

I want the flower and fruit of a man ; that some fragrance be wafted over from him to me, and some ripeness flavour our intercourse. His goodness must not be a partial and transitory act, but a constant superfluity, which costs him nothing and of which he is unconscious. This is a charity that hides a multitude of sins. The philanthropist too often surrounds mankind with the remembrance of his own cast-off griefs as an atmosphere and calls it sympathy. What is called charity is no charity, but the interference of a third person. Shall I interfere with fate ? Shall I defraud man of the opportunities which God gave him, and so take away his life ? Be sure that you give the poor the aid they most need, though it be your example which leaves them far behind. If you give money, spend yourself with it, and do not merely abandon it to them. . . . You boast of spending a tenth part of your income in charity ; maybe you should spend the nine-tenths so, and done with it. Society recovers only a tenth part of the property then. Is this owing to the generosity of him in whose

possession it is found, or to the remissness of the officers of justice?

A man is not a *good man* to me because he will feed me if I should be starving, or warm me if I should be freezing, or pull me out of a ditch if I should ever fall into one. I can find you a Newfoundland dog that will do as much. Philanthropy is not love for one's fellow-man in the broadest sense. Howard (Jesse James) was no doubt an exceedingly kind and worthy man in his way, and has his reward; but, comparatively speaking, what are a hundred Howards to *us*, if their philanthropy do not help *us* in our best estate, when we are most worthy to be helped? I never heard of a philanthropic meeting in which it was sincerely proposed to do any good to me, or the like of me.

How long shall we sit in our porticoes practising idle and musty virtues, which any work would make impertinent? As if one were to begin the day with long-suffering, and hire a man to hoe his potatoes; and in the afternoon go forth to practise Christian meekness and charity with goodness aforethought!

How wholesome winter is . . . how good, above all mere sentimental, warm-blooded, short-lived, soft-hearted, *moral* goodness, commonly so-called. Give me the goodness which has forgotten its own deeds—which God has seen to be good, and let be. None of your *just made perfect*—pickled eels! All that will save them will be their picturesqueness, as with blasted trees. Whatever is, and is not ashamed to be, is good. I value no moral goodness or greatness, unless it is good or great, even as that snowy peak is. Pray, how could thirty feet of bowels improve it? Nature is goodness crystallized.

Absolutely speaking, Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you is by no means a golden rule, but the best of current silver. An honest man would have but little occasion for it. The greater part of what my neigh-

bours call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behaviour. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well? You may say the wisest thing you can, old man—you who have lived seventy years, not without honour of a kind—I hear an irresistible voice which invites me away from all that. One generation abandons the enterprises of another like stranded vessels

Men have a singular desire to be good without being good for anything, because, perchance, they think vaguely that so it will be good for them in the end. The sort of morality which the priests inculcate is a very subtle policy, far finer than the politicians', and the world is very successfully ruled by them as policemen

The Jesuits were quite baulked by those Indians who, being burned at the stake, suggested new modes of torture to their tormentors. Being superior to physical suffering, it sometimes chanced that they were superior to any consolation which the missionaries could offer, and the law to do as you would be done by fell with less persuasiveness on the ears of those who, for their part, did not care how they were done by, who loved their enemies after a new fashion, and came very near freely forgiving them all they did

I have actually fished from the same kind of necessity that the first fishers did. Whatever humanity I might conjure up against it was all factitious, and concerned my philosophy more than my feelings. Not that I am less humane than others, but I did not perceive that my feelings were much affected. I did not pity the fishes nor the worms. This was habit

I did not wish to kill or to be killed, but I can foresee circumstances in which both of these things would be by me unavoidable. In extremities I could even be killed. I found myself ranging the woods, like a half-starved hound,

with a strange abandonment, seeking some kind of venison which I might devour, and no morsel could have been too savage for me. The wildest scenes had become unaccountably familiar. I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good.

I very rarely, indeed, if ever, "feel any itching to be what is called useful to my fellow-men." Sometimes—it may be when my thoughts for want of employment fall into a beaten path or humdrum—I have dreamed idly of stopping a man's horse that was running away; but, perchance, I wished that he might run, in order that I might stop him—or of putting out a fire; but then, of course, it must have got well a-going. Now, to tell the truth, I do not dream much of acting upon horses before they run, or of preventing fires which are not yet kindled. What a foul subject is this of doing good! instead of minding one's life, which should be his business; doing good as a dead carcass, which is only fit for manure. instead of as a living man—instead of taking care to flourish, and smell and taste sweet, and refresh all mankind to the extent of our capacity and quality. People will sometimes try to persuade you that you have done something from that motive, as if you did not already know enough about it. If I ever *did* a man any good, in their sense, of course it was something exceptional and insignificant compared with the good or evil which I am constantly doing by being what I am. As if you were to preach to ice to shape itself into burning-glasses, which are sometimes useful, and so the peculiar properties of ice be lost. Ice that merely performs the office of a burning-glass does not do its duty.

I must conclude that Conscience, if that be the name of it, was not given us for no purpose, or for a hindrance. . . .

The expedients of the nations clash with one another : only the absolutely right is expedient for all. . . . To make up a great action there are no subordinate mean ones.

Men, say practically, Begin where you are and such as you are, without aiming mainly to become of more worth, and with kindness aforesought go about doing good. If I were to preach at all in this strain, I should say rather, Set about being good.

Most have sufficient contempt for what is mean to resolve that they will abstain from it, and a few virtue enough to abide by their resolution, but not often does one attain to such lofty contempt as to require no resolution to be made

It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous, wrong , he may still properly have other concerns to engage him , but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support. If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders.

I came into this world, not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad A man has not everything to do, but something ; and because he cannot do *everything*, it is not necessary that he should do *something* wrong.

### (g) *Chastity is the only virtue*

Chastity is the flowering of man ; and what are called Genius, Heroism, Holiness and the like, are but various fruits which succeed it . . . By turns our purity inspires and our impurity casts us down

What is chastity ? How shall a man know if he is chaste ? He shall not know it We have heard of this virtue, but we know not what it is We speak conformably to the

rumour which we have heard. From exertion come wisdom and purity ; from sloth ignorance and sensuality. In the student sensuality is a sluggish habit of mind. An unclean person is universally a slothful one, one who sits by a stove, whom the sun shines on prostrate, who reposes without being fatigued. If you would avoid uncleanness, and all the sins, work earnestly, though it be at cleaning a stable.

It would be worth the while to ask ourselves . . . Is our life innocent enough ? Do we live *inhumanely*, toward man or beast, in thought or act ? To be serene and successful we must be at one with the universe. The least conscious and needless injury inflicted on any creature is to its extent a suicide. What peace—or life—can a murderer have ? We are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers. It is reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled ; like the worms which, even in life and health, occupy our bodies. Possibly we may withdraw from it, but never change its nature. I fear that it may enjoy a certain leath of its own ; that we may be well but not pure . . . Who knows what sort of life would result if we had attained to purity ? If I knew so wise a man as could teach me purity I would go to seek him forthwith.

#### FREE WILL—NECESSITY

Whether he sleeps or wakes—whether he runs or walks—whether he uses a microscope or a telescope, or his naked eye—a man never discovers anything, never overtakes anything, or leaves anything behind, but himself. Whatever he says or does, he merely reports himself. If he is in love, he *loves* ; if he is in heaven, he *enjoys* ; if he is in hell, he *suffers*. It is his condition that determines his locality.

It may always be a question of how much or how little

of a man goes to any particular act. It is not merely by taking time and by a conscious effort that he betrays himself. A man is revealed, and a man is concealed, in a myriad unexpected ways ; e.g., I can hardly think of a more effectual way of disguising neighbours to one another than by stripping them naked.

Every judgment and action of a man qualifies every other, i.e. corrects our estimate of every other, as, for instance, a man's idea of immortality who is a member of a church, or his praise of you coupled with his praise of those whom you do not esteem. For in this sense a man is awfully consistent, above his own consciousness. All a man's strength and all his weakness go to make up the authority of any particular opinion which he may utter.

There is always some accident in the best things, whether thoughts or expressions or deeds. The memorable thought, the happy expression, the admirable deed are only partly ours. The thought came to us because we were in a fit mood ; also we were unconscious and did not know that we had said or done a good thing. We must walk consciously only part way toward our goal, and then leap in the dark to our success. What we do best or most perfectly is what we have most thoroughly learned by the longest practice, and at length it falls from us without our notice, as a leaf from a tree.

Lewis the blind man's horse, which works on the sawing-machine at the depot, now let out to graze along the road . . . at each step . . . lifts his hind legs convulsively high from the ground, as if the whole earth were a treadmill continually slipping away from under him while he climbed its convex surface. It was painful to witness, but it was symbolical of the moral condition of his master and of all artisans in contradistinction from artists, all who are engaged in any routine ; for to them also the whole earth is a tread-

mill, and the routine results instantly in a similar painful deformity. The horse may bear the mark of his servitude on the muscles of his legs, the man on his brow.

There was the horse, a mere animated machine—though his tail was brushing off the flies—his whole existence subordinated to the man's, with no tradition, perhaps no instinct, in him of independence and freedom, of a time when he was wild and free—completely humanized.

It was plain that the man was not educating the horse ; not trying to develop his nature, but merely getting work out of him. That mass of animated matter seemed more completely the servant of man than any inanimate. For slaves have their holidays ; a heaven is conceded to them, but to the horse none. Now and forever he is man's slave. The more I considered, the more the man seemed akin to the horse ; only his was the stronger will of the two. For a little further on I saw an Irishman shovelling, who evidently was as much tamed as the horse. He had stipulated that to a certain extent his independence be recognized, and yet really he was but little more independent. In this sense original and independent men are wild—not tamed and broken by society. Now for my part I have such respect for the horse's nature as would tempt me to let him alone ; not to interfere with him—his walks, his diet, his loves. . . . Suppose that every squirrel were made to turn a coffee-mill ! ! ! Suppose that the gazelles were made to draw milk-carts ! . . . What is it but a system of slavery ? and do you not thus by *insensible* and unimportant degrees come to human slavery ? Has not the horse lost its liberty ! —and has man got any more liberty himself for having robbed the horse, or has he lost just as much of his own, and become more like the horse he has robbed ? Is not the other end of the bridle in this case, too, coiled round his own neck ?

Public opinion is a weak tyrant compared with our

own private opinion What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines, or rather indicates, his fate.

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.

What shall we say of those timid folk who carry the principle of thinking nothing and doing nothing and being nothing to such an extreme? As if, in the absence of thought, that vast yearning of their natures for something to fill the vacuum made the least traditional expression and shadow of a thought to be clung to with instinctive tenacity. They atone for their producing nothing by a brutish respect for something. They are as simple as oxen, and as guiltless of thought and reflection. Their reflections are reflected from other minds. The creature of institutions, bigoted and a conservatist, can say nothing hearty. He rebuts you by avoiding you. He is shocked like a woman.

Who can doubt that men are by a certain fate what they are, contending with unseen and unimagin'd difficulties, or encouraged and aided by equally mysterious auspicious circumstances? Individuals accept their fate and live according to it. Man is the artificer of his own happiness. Let him beware how he complains of the disposition of circumstances, for it is his own disposition he blames. If this is sour, or that rough, or the other steep, let him think if it be not his work. If his look curdles all hearts, let him not complain of a sour reception; if he hobble in his gait, let him not grumble at the roughness of the way, if he is weak in the knees, let him not call the hill steep.

That which properly constitutes the life of every man is a profound secret. Yet this is what every one would give the most to know, but is himself most backward to impart. No man seems to be aware that his influence is the result of his entire character, both that which is subject and that which is superior to his understanding, and what he really means or intends it is not in his power to explain or offer an apology for

What first suggested that necessity was grim, and made fate so fatal? The strongest is always the least violent. Necessity is a sort of Eastern cushion on which I recline. I contemplate its mild and inflexible countenance, as the haze in October days. When I am vexed I only ask to be left alone with it. Leave me to my fate. It is the bosom of time and the lap of eternity, since to be necessary is to be needful, it is only another name for inflexibility of good.

## GOOD AND EVIL

### (a) *Good and evil are interdependent*

We cannot do well without our sins, they are the highway of our virtue. I never dreamed of any enormity greater than I have committed. I never knew, and never shall know, a worse man than myself. I sometimes seem to myself to owe all my little success, all for which men commend me, to my vices. I am perhaps more wilful than others and make enormous sacrifices even of others' happiness, it may be, to gain my ends. It would seem even as if nothing good could be accomplished without some vice to aid in it. Filth and impurity are as old as cleanliness and purity. To correspond to man completely, Nature is perhaps unchaste herself. Or perchance man's impurity begets a monster somewhere, to proclaim his sin.

No faculty in man was created with a useless or sinister intent ; in no respect can he be wholly bad, but the worst passions have their root in the best—as anger, for instance, may be only a perverted sense of wrong which yet retains some trace of its origin.

Virtue is the very heart and lungs of vice ; it cannot stand up but it lean on virtue. The broadest and most prevalent error requires the most disinterested virtue to sustain it. When we speak of a peculiarity in a man or a nation, we think to describe only one part, a mere mathematical point ; but it is not so. It pervades all. Some parts may be farther removed than others from this centre, but not a particle so remote as not to be either shined on or shaded by it.

The life of a good man will hardly improve us more than the life of a freebooter, for the inevitable laws appear as plainly in the infringement as in the observance, and our lives are sustained by a nearly equal expense of virtue of some kind.

Every time we teach our virtue a new nobleness we teach our vice a new cunning.

There is no odour so bad as that which arises from goodness tainted. It is human, it is divine, carrión.

It is remarkable that a mere gall, which at first we are inclined to regard as something abnormal, should be made so beautiful, as if it were the *flower* of the tree ; that a disease, an excrescence, should prove, perchance, the greatest beauty—as the tear of the pearl. Beautiful scarlet sins they may be. Through our temptations—aye, and our falls—our virtues appear. As in many a character—many a poet—we see that beauty exhibited in a gall which was meant to have bloomed in a flower, unchecked. Such, however, is the accomplishment of the world. The poet cherishes his chagrins and sets his sighs to music. This gall is the tree's “Ode to Dejection.”

How oft it chances that the apparent fruit of a shrub, its apple, is merely a fall or blight ! How many men meet with some blast in the moist growing days of their youth, and what should have been a sweet and palatable fruit in them becomes a mere puff and excrescence, ripening no kernel, and they say that they have experienced religion ! For the hardening of the seed is the crisis Their fruit is a gall, a puff, an excrescence, for want of moderation and continence. So many plants never ripen their fruit.

Seen in this light, our life with all its diseases will look healthy, and in one sense the more healthy as it is the more diseased Disease is not the accident of the individual, nor even of the generation, but of life itself In some form, and to some degree or other, it is one of the permanent conditions of life It is, nevertheless, a cheering fact that men affirm health unanimously, and esteem themselves miserable failures without it Here was no blunder. They gave us life on exactly these conditions, and methinks we shall live it with more heart when we perceive clearly that these are the terms on which we have it Life is a warfare, a struggle, and the diseases of the body answer to the troubles and defeats of the spirit Man begins by quarrelling with the animal in him, and the result is immediate disease. In proportion as the spirit is the more ambitious and persevering, the more obstacles it will meet with. It is as a seer that man asserts his disease to be exceptional. The unwise are accustomed to speak as if some were not sick ; but methinks the difference between men in respect to health is not great enough to lay much stress upon

Organization—how it prevails ! After a little discipline, we study with love and reverence the forms of disease as healthy organisms Since all things are good, men fail at last to distinguish which is the bane and which the antidote

(b) *Nature is unmoral*

We are cheered when we observe the vulture feeding on the carrion which disgusts and disheartens us, and deriving health and strength from the repast. There was a dead horse in the hollow by the path to my house, which compelled me sometimes to go out of my way, especially in the night when the air was heavy, but the assurance it gave me of the strong appetite and inviolable health of Nature was my compensation for this. I love to see that Nature is so rife with life that myriads can be afforded to be sacrificed and suffered to prey on one another ; that tender organizations can be so serenely squashed out of existence like pulp—tadpoles which herons gobble up, and tortoises and toads run over in the road ; and that sometimes it has rained flesh and blood ! With the liability to accident, we must see how little account is to be made of it. The impression made on a wise man is that of universal innocence. Poison is not poisonous after all, nor are any wounds fatal. Compassion is a very untenable ground It must be expeditious Its pleadings will not bear to be stereotyped

I picked up to-day the lower jaw of a hog, with white and sound teeth and tusks, which reminded me that there was an animal health and vigour distinct from the spiritual health. This animal succeeded by other means than temperance and purity. What slight but important distinctions between one creature and another !

There is never an instant's truce between virtue and vice. Goodness is the only investment which never fails. In the music of the harp which trembles round the world it is the insisting on this which thrills us. . . . Though the youth at last grows indifferent, the laws of the universe are not indifferent, but are forever on the side of the most sensitive. Listen to every zephyr for some reproof, for it

is surely there, and he is unfortunate who does not hear it  
We cannot touch a string or move a stop but the charming  
moral transfixes us Many an irksome noise, go a long way  
off, is heard as music, a proud, sweet satire on the meanness  
of our lives

The best thought is not only without sombreness, but  
even without morality The universe lies outspread in  
floods of white light to it The moral aspect is a jaundice  
reflected from man Occasionally we rise above the  
necessity of virtue into an unchangeable morning light, in  
which we shall have not to choose in a dilemma between  
right and wrong, but simply to live right on and breathe  
the circumambient air

(c) *Good and Evil are perhaps resolved in Beauty*

We love nothing which is merely good and not fair,  
if such a thing is possible

Cutting a maple for a bridge over Lily Brook, I was  
rejoiced to see the sap falling in large, clear drops from the  
wound

not a pickerel or shiner picks an insect from this  
smooth surface but it manifestly disturbs the equilibrium of  
the whole lake It is wonderful with what elaborateness  
this simple fact is advertised—this piscine murderer will  
out . . . Not a fish can leap or an insect fall on the pond  
but it is thus reported in circling dimples, in lines of beauty,  
as it were the constant welling up of its fountain, the gentle  
pulsing of its life, the heaving of its breast The thrills  
of joy and the thrills of pain are undistinguishable How  
peaceful the phenomena of the lake !

If for a moment we make way with our petty selves, wish  
no ill to anything, apprehend no ill, cease to be but as the  
crystal which reflects a ray—what shall we not reflect !  
What a universe will appear crystallized and radiant around

## THE EMOTIONS

### (a) *The Will to Live*

This life is not for complaint, but for satisfaction. We are shown fair scenes in order that we may be tempted to inhabit them, and not simply to tell what we have seen.

Any prospect of awakening or coming to life to a dead man makes indifferent all times and places. The place where that may occur is always the same, and indescribably pleasant to all our senses.

Whatever your sex or position, life is a battle in which you are to show your pluck, and woe be to the coward. Whether passed on a bed of sickness or a tented field, it is ever the same fair play and admits no foolish distinction. Despair and postponement are cowardice and defeat. Men were born to succeed, not to fail. . . . To stay in the house all day, such reviving spring days as the past have been, bending over a stove and gnawing one's heart, seems to me as absurd as for a woodchuck to linger in his burrow. . . . Sucking the claws of our philosophy when there is game to be had !

One while we do not wonder that so many commit suicide, life is so barren and worthless ; we only live on by an effort of the will. Suddenly our condition is ameliorated, and even the barking of a dog is a pleasure to us. So closely is our happiness bound up with our physical condition, and one reacts on the other. In sickness and barrenness it is encouraging to believe that our life is dammed and is coming to a head, so that there seems to be no loss, for what is lost in time is gained in power.

If you are afflicted with melancholy at this season, go to the swamp and see the brave spears of skunk-cabbage buds already advanced toward a new year. Their gravestones are

not bespoken yet. . . . Winter and death are ignored, the circle of life is complete. Are these false prophets? Is it a lie or a vain boast underneath the skunk-cabbage bud, pushing it upward and lifting the dead leaves with it? I confess that I love to be convinced of this inextinguishable vitality in Nature.

Finding yourself yoked to Matter and to Time . . . A day when you cannot pluck a flower, cannot dig a parsnip, nor pull a turnip, for the frozen ground! . . . What avails you now the fire you stole from heaven? . . . All fields lie fallow. Shall not your mind? . . . there are brave thoughts within you that shall remain to rustle the winter through like white oak leaves upon your boughs, or like shrub oaks that remind the traveller of a fire upon the hillsides; or evergreen thoughts, cold even in midsummer. . . . Some warm springs shall still tinkle and fume, and send their column of vapour to the skies.

Do not despair of life. You have no doubt force enough to overcome your obstacles. Think of the fox prowling through wood and field in a winter night for something to satisfy his hunger. Notwithstanding cold and the hounds and traps, his race survives. I do not believe any of them ever committed suicide. I saw this afternoon where probably a fox had rolled some small carcass in the snow. There are two ways to victory—to strive bravely, or to yield. How much pain the last will save we have not yet learned.

### (b) *The Intensity of Experience*

I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow

of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world ; or if it were sublime, to know by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have somewhat hastily concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy Him for ever."

Let a man step to the music which he hears, however measured. Is it important that I should mature as soon as an apple tree ? . . . May I not sacrifice a hasty and petty completeness here to entireness there ? If my curve is large, why bend it to a small circle ? . . . The society which I was made for is not here. Shall I, then, substitute for the anticipation of that this poor reality ? . . . I will not be shipwrecked on a vain reality.

It is remarkable how few events or crises there are in our minds' histories, how little *exercised* we have been in our minds, how few experiences we have had. As if you could kill time without injuring eternity !

I sometimes think that I may go forth and walk hard and earnestly, and live a more substantial life and get a glorious experience ; be much abroad in heat and cold, day and night ; live more, expend more atmospheres, be weary often, etc. etc. But then swiftly the thought comes to me, Go not so far out of your way for a truer life ; keep strictly onward in that path alone which your genius points out.

To live in relations of truth and sincerity with men is to dwell in a frontier country . . . the seeing depends ever on the being.

All report of travel is the report of victory or defeat, of a contest with every event and phenomenon and how you

came out of it. . . . Nothing like a little internal activity called life—if it were only walking much in a day—to keep the eyes in good order.

We do not commonly live our life out and full ; we do not fill all our pores with our blood ; we do not inspire and expire fully and entirely enough, so that the wave, the comber, of each inspiration shall break upon our extremest shores, rolling till it meets the sand which bounds us, and the sound of the surf come back to us. Might not a bellows assist us to breathe ? That our breathing should create a wind in a calm day ! . . . Why do we not let on the flood, raise the gates, and set all wheels in motion ? He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. Employ your senses Will you live ? or will you be embalmed ? Will you live, though it be astride of a sunbeam ; or will you repose safely in the catacombs for a thousand years ? In the former case, the worst accident that can happen is that you may break your neck. Will you break your heart, your soul, to save your neck ? Necks and pipestems are fated to be broken Men make a great ado about the folly of demanding too much of life (or of eternity ?), and of endeavouring to live according to that demand It is much ado about nothing. I am not afraid that I shall exaggerate the value and significance of life, but that I shall not be up to the occasion which it is. I shall be sorry to remember that I was there, but noticed nothing remarkable.

The only fruit which even much living yields seems to be often only some trivial success—the ability to do some slight thing better. We make conquest only of husks and shells for the most part, —at least apparently—but sometimes these are cinnamon and spices, you know. . . . What immense sacrifices, what hecatombs and holocausts, the gods exact for very slight favours ! How much sincere life before we can even utter one sincere word I have not yet learned to live, that I can see, and I fear that I shall not

very soon. I find, however, that in the long run things correspond to my original idea, that they correspond to nothing else so much ; and thus a man may really be a true prophet without any great exertion

You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment . . . There is no other land ; there is no other life but this, or the like of this . . . This is no world for the penitent and regretful We do not live by justice, but by grace.

(c) *Feeling depends on temperament, and age, and physical state*

Ah, that life that I have known ! How hard it is to remember what is most memorable ! We remember how we itched, not how our hearts beat. I can sometimes recall to mind the quality, the immortality, of my youthful life, but in memory is the only relation to it. When a man is young and his constitution and body have not acquired firmness . . . he is not an assured inhabitant of the earth, and his compensation is that he is not quite earthly . . . there is something peculiarly tender and divine about him. His sentiments and his weakness, nay, his very sickness and the greater uncertainty of his fate, seem to ally him to a noble race of beings, to whom he in part belongs, or with whom he is in communication . . . He bathes in light He is interesting as a stranger from another sphere He really thinks and talks about a larger sphere of existence than this world It takes him forty years to accommodate himself to the carapax of this world. This is the age of poetry Afterward he may be the president of a bank, and go the way of all flesh. But a man of settled views, whose thoughts are few and hardened like his bones, is truly mortal, and his only resource is to say his prayers.

Perchance as we grow old we cease to spring with the

spring, and we are indifferent to the succession of years, and they go by without epoch as months. Woe be to us when we cease to form new resolutions on the opening of a new year!

The birds sing not so earnestly as joyously, there is a blurring ripple on the surface of the lake. How few valuable observations can we make in youth! What if there were united the susceptibility of youth with the discrimination of age? Once I was part and parcel of Nature, now I am observant of her.

My present experience is nothing, my past experience is all in all. I think that no experience which I have to-day comes up to, or is comparable with, the experiences of my boyhood. And not only this is true, but as far back as I can remember I have unconsciously referred to the experiences of a previous state of existence. Formerly

Nature developed as I developed, and grew up with me. My life was ecstasy. In youth, before I lost any of my senses, I can remember that I was all alive, and inhabited my body with inexpressible satisfaction, both its weariness and its refreshment were sweet to me. This earth was the most glorious musical instrument, and I was audience to its strains. I said to myself "There comes into my mind such an indescribable, infinite, all-absorbing, divine, heavenly pleasure, a sense of elevation and expansion, and I have had nought to do with it. I perceive that I am dealt with by superior powers. This is a pleasure, a joy, an existence which I have not procured myself. I speak as a witness on the stand, and tell what I have perceived."

For years I marched as to a music in comparison with which the military music of the streets is noise and discord. I was daily intoxicated, and yet no man could call me intemperate.

I too revive as does the grass after rain. We are never so flourishing, our day is never so fair, but that the sun may come out a little brighter through mists and we yearn to

live a better life. What have we to boast of? We are made the very sewers, the cloacae, of Nature. As are your bowels, so are the stars.

(d) *Joy and Sorrow*

If a man do not revive with Nature in the spring, how shall he revive when a white-collared priest prays for him? Those Jews were too sad · to another people a still deeper revelation may suggest only joy. Don't I know what gladness is? Is it but the reflex of sadness, its back side? In the Hebrew gladness, I hear but too distinctly still the sound of sadness retreating. Give me a gladness which has never given place to sadness.

You ask if there is no doctrine of sorrow in my philosophy. Of acute sorrow I suppose that I know comparatively little. My saddest and most genuine sorrows are apt to be but transient regrets. The place of sorrow is supplied, perchance, by a certain hard and proportionately barren indifference. I am of kin to the sod, and partake largely of its dull patience—in winter expecting the spring. . . . I know very well what Goethe meant when he said that he never had a chagrin but he made a poem out of it. I have altogether too much patience of this kind. I am too easily contented with a slight and almost animal happiness. My happiness is a good deal like that of the woodchucks.

What means the fact—which is so common, so universal—that some soul that has lost all hope for itself can inspire in another listening soul an infinite confidence in it, even while it is expressing its despair.

Soon after John's death I listened to a music-box, and if, at any time, that event had seemed inconsistent with the beauty and harmony of the universe, it was then gently constrained into the placid course of Nature by those steady notes, in mild and unoffended tone echoing far and wide

under the heavens. But I find these things more strange than sad to me. What right have I to grieve, who have not ceased to wonder? We feel at first as if some opportunities of kindness and sympathy were lost, but learn afterwards that any *pure grief* is ample recompense for all. That is, if we are faithful; for a great grief is but sympathy with the soul that disposes events, and is as natural as the resin on Arabian trees. Only Nature has a right to grieve perpetually for she only is innocent. Soon the ice will melt, and the blackbirds sing along the river which he frequented, as pleasantly as ever. The same everlasting serenity will appear in this face of God, and we will not be sorrowful if he is not.

See what a life the gods have given us, set round with pain and pleasure. It is too strange for sorrow, it is too strange for joy.

(c) *Love*

Love is a mutual confidence whose foundations no one knows. The one I love surpasses all the laws of Nature in sureness. Love is capable of any wisdom

Every one experiences that, while his relation to another actually may be one of distrust and disappointment, he may still have relations to him ideally and so really, in spite of both. He is faintly conscious of a confidence and satisfaction somewhere, and all further intercourse is based on this experience of success.

By our very mutual attraction, and our attraction to all other spheres [we] are kept properly asunder. Two planets which are mutually attracted, being at the same time attracted by the sun, preserve equipoise and harmony.

(f) *Regret*

Our most glorious experiences are a kind of regret. Our regret is so sublime that we may mistake it for triumph. It

is the painful, plaintively sad surprise of our Genius re-inremembering our past lives and contemplating what is possible. It is remarkable that men commonly never refer to, never hint at, any crowning experiences when the common laws of their being were unsettled and the divine and eternal laws prevailed in them. Their lives are not revolutionary; they never recognize any other than the local and temporal authorities.

Silence is the universal refuge, the sequel to all dull discourses, and all foolish acts, a balm to our every chagrin, as welcome after satiety as after disappointment.

(g) *But all emotional heights and depths are resolved in Nature which is the general haven of feeling*

There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still. There was never yet such a storm but it was Aeolian music to a healthy and innocent ear. Nothing can rightly compel a simple and brave man to a vulgar sadness. While I enjoy the friendship of the seasons I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me. The gentle rain which waters my beans and keeps me in the house to-day is not drear and melancholy, but good for me too. Though it prevents my hoeing them, it is of far more worth than my hoeing. . . Sometimes, when I compare myself with other men, it seems as if I were more favoured by the gods than they, beyond any deserts that I am conscious of; as if I had a warrant and surety at their hands which my fellows have not, and were especially guided and guarded. I do not flatter myself, but if it be possible they flatter me. I have never felt lonesome, or in the least oppressed by a sense of solitude, but once, and that was a few weeks after I came to the woods, when, for an hour, I doubted if the near neighbourhood of man was not essential to a serene and healthy life. To be alone was something unpleasant. But I was at the same time conscious of a

slight insanity in my mood, and seemed to foresee my recovery. In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very patterning of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighbourhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. . . . I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and the humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again

## SOCIETY

### I. GOVERNMENT

#### (a) *Government is good when it is least*

I heartily accept the motto, "That government is best which governs least"; . . . Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe—"That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have

There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly.

#### (b) *Governments tend to perpetuate and enhance their worst qualities*

Thus the State never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses . . . the

proverb that man was made for society, so long as it was not allowed to conflict with another important truth, deceived no one ; but, now that the same words have come to stand for another thing, it may be for a lie, we are obliged, in order to preserve its significance, to write it anew, so that properly it will read, Society was made for man. Man is not at once born into society—hardly into the world. The world that he is hides for a time the world that he inhabits.

They preserve the so-called peace of their community by deeds of petty violence every day. Look at the policeman's billy and handcuffs ! Look at the jail ! Look at the gallows ! Look at the chaplain of the regiment ! We are hoping only to live safely on the outskirts of *this* provisional army. So they defend themselves and our hen-roosts. If private men are obliged to perform the offices of government, to protect the weak and dispense justice, then the government becomes only a hired man, or clerk, to perform menial or indifferent services. Of course, that is but the shadow of a government, whose existence necessitates a Vigilance Committee.

The effect of a good government is to make life more valuable—of a bad government, to make it less valuable. All men recognize the right of revolution ; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are [*sic*] great and unendurable. Unjust laws exist. . . . Men generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them. They think that, if they should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil. But it is the fault of the government itself that the remedy is worse than the evil. *It makes it worse.* Why is it not more apt to anticipate and provide for reform ? . . . Why does it always crucify Christ, and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther, and pronounce Washington and Franklin rebels ?

This American government—what is it but a tradition,

though a recent one, endeavouring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity, but each instant losing some of its integrity. It has not the vitality and force of a single living man ; for a single man can bend it to his will. The American has dwindled into an Odd Fellow—one who may be known by the development of his organ of gregariousness, and a manifest lack of intellect and cheerful self-reliance ; What trifling upon a serious subject ! while honest men are sawing wood for them outside. Your Congress halls have an ale-house odour—a place for stale jokes and vulgar wit. It compels me to think of my fellow-creatures as apes and baboons. What a grovelling appetite for profitless jest and amusement our countrymen have ! Next to a good dinner, at least, they love a good joke—to have their sides tickled, to laugh sociably, as in the East they bathe and are shampooed.

(c) *Criticism of Democracy*

After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long period continue, to rule is not because they are most likely to be in the right, nor because this seems fairest to the minority, but because they are physically the strongest.

Methinks that many, if not most, men are a sort of natural mummies. The life having departed out of them, decay and putrefaction, disorganization, has not taken place, but they still keep up a dry and withered semblance of life. What the salt is that saves them and robs the worms I do not know. Some bodies there are that, being dead and buried, do not decay, but after the lapse of years are found as fresh as if they had died but yesterday. So some men, though all true life was long ago extinct in them, wear this deceitful semblance of life. They seem to live on, without salt or season, from mere toughness or dryness or some antiseptic

quality in their fibre They do not mellowly dissolve and fatten the earth with their decay

In face of all statistics, I will never believe that it is the descendants of tradesmen who keep the State alive, but of simple yeomen or labourers. This, indeed, statistics say of the city reinforced by the country. The oldest, wisest politician grows not more human so, but is merely a grey wharf rat at last. He makes a habit of disregarding the moral right and wrong for the legal or political, commits a slow suicide, and thinks to recover by retiring on to a farm at last. This simplicity it is, and the vigour it imparts, that enables the simple vagabond, though he does get drunk and is sent to the house of correction so often, to hold up his head among men.

The institutions of almost all kinds are thus of a sectarian or party character. Newspapers, magazines, colleges and all forms of government and religion express the superficial activity of a few, the mass either conforming or not attending. It is unsafe to defer so much to mankind and the opinions of society, for these are always and without exception heathenish and barbarous, seen from the heights of philosophy. A wise man sees as clearly the heathenism and barbarity of his own countrymen as those of the nations to whom his countrymen send missionaries.

I cast my vote, perchance, as I think right, but I am not vitally concerned that right should prevail. I am willing to leave it to the majority. Its obligation, therefore, never exceeds that of expediency. A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority. There is but little virtue in the action of masses of men.

I feel that the public demand an average man—average thoughts and manners—not originality, nor even absolute excellence. You cannot interest them except as you are like them and sympathize with them.

*(d) Law and the Myth of Justice*

The only government that I recognize is that power that establishes justice in the land, never that which establishes injustice. The murderer always knows that he is justly punished ; but when a government takes the life of a man without the consent of his conscience, it is an audacious government, and is taking a step towards its own dissolution. Is it not possible that an individual may be right and a government wrong ? Are laws to be enforced simply because they were made, and declared by any number of men to be good, when they are *not* good ? Is there any necessity for a man's being a tool to perform a deed of which he disapproves ? Is it the intention of lawmakers that good men shall be hung ever ? Are judges to interpret the law according to the letter, and not the spirit ? . What right have you to enter into a compact with yourself (even) that you *will* do thus or so, against your better nature ? Is it for you to *make up* your mind—to *form* any resolution whatever—and not accept the convictions that are forced upon you, and which even pass your *understanding* ?

Treason ! where does treason take its rise ? I cannot help thinking of you as you deserve, ye governments. Can you dry up the fountain of thought ? High treason which is resistance to *tyranny* here below has its origin in, and is first committed by, the power that makes and forever re-creates man. When you have caught and hung all of these human rebels, you have accomplished nothing but your own guilt, for you have not struck at the fountainhead. You presume to contend with a foe against whom West Point cadets and rifled cannon *point* not. Can all the arts of the cannon-founder tempt matter to turn against its Maker ? Is the form in which he casts it more essential than the constitution of it and of himself ?

It is not for a man to *put himself* in such an attitude to

society, but to maintain himself in whatever attitude he finds himself through obedience to the laws of his being, which will never be one of opposition to a just government. Cut the leather only where the shoe pinches. Let us not have a rabid virtue that will be revenged on society—that falls on it, not like the morning dew, but like the fervid noonday sun, to wither it.

It costs us nothing to be just. It enriches us infinitely, to recognize greater qualities than we possess in another. The lawyer's truth is not Truth, but consistency or a consistent expediency. It is the spirit of humanity, that which animates both so-called savages and civilized nations, working through a man, and not the man expressing himself, that interests us most. The thought of a so-called savage tribe is generally far more just than that of a single civilized man.

It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. . . . Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice. A common and natural result of an undue respect for law is, that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys and all, marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills, ay, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart.

We do not live by justice, but by grace.

## 2. MONEY

(a) *The very idea of money is itself an evil and makes ugly all it touches*

A thing is not valuable—e.g. a fine situation for a house—until it is convertible into so much money, that is, can cease to be what it is and become something else which you

prefer. So you will see that all prosaic people who possess only the commonest sense, who believe strictly in this kind of wealth, are speculators in fancy stocks and continually cheat themselves, but poets and all discerning people, who have an object in life and know what they want, speculate in real values. The mean and low values of anything depend on its convertibility into something else—*i.e.* have nothing to do with its intrinsic value.

If I buy one necessary of life, I cheat myself to some extent; I deprive myself of the pleasure, the inexpressible joy, which is the unfailing reward of satisfying any want of our nature simply and truly. No trade is simple, but artificial and complex. It postpones life and substitutes death. It goes against the grain. If the first generation does not die of it, the third or fourth does.

Men will tell you sometimes that “money’s hard.” That shows it was not made to eat, I say.

If you win, society is the loser. The gold-digger is the enemy of the honest labourer, whatever checks and compensations a kind fate (?) has provided. The humblest thinker who has been to the mines and sees and says that gold-digging is of the character of a lottery, that the reward is not proportionate to the labour, that the gold has not the same look, is not the same thing, with the wages of honest toil, but he practically forgets what he has seen, for he has seen only the fact, not the principle. He looks out for “the main chance” still, he buys a ticket in another lottery, nevertheless, where the fact is not so obvious. No doubt a low self-interest is a better motive force to these enterprises than no interest at all, but a high self-interest, which consists with the greatest advantage of all, would be better still.

### (b) *Luxury and idleness are weakening and unjust*

What an army of non-producers society produces—ladies generally (old and young) and gentlemen of leisure, so

called ! Many think themselves well employed as charitable dispensers of wealth which somebody else earned, and these who produce nothing, being of the most luxurious habits, ~~are~~ precisely they who want the most, and complain loudest when they do not get what they want. They who are literally paupers maintained at the public expense are the most unfortunate and insatiable beggars. They cling like the gluttons to a living man and suck his vitals up. To every locomotive man there are three or four deadheads clinging to him, as if they conferred a great favour on society by living upon it. Meanwhile they fill the churches, and die and revive from time to time. They have nothing to do but sin, and repent of their sins. How can you expect such bloodsuckers to be happy ?

Think of the numbers—men and women—who want and *will* have and *do* have (how do they get it ?) what they will not earn ? The non-producers. How many of these blood-suckers there are fastened to every helpful man or woman in this world ! It is a world full of snivelling prayers—whose religion is a prayer ! As if beggars were admirable, were respectable, to anybody !

The student who secures his coveted leisure and retirement by systematically shirking any labour necessary to man obtains but an ignoble and unprofitable leisure, defrauding himself of the experience which alone can make leisure fruitful. I mean that they should not *play life, or study it merely, while the community supports them at this expensive game, but earnestly live it* from beginning to end. . . If I wished a boy to know something about the arts and sciences, for instance, I would not pursue the common course, which is merely to send him into the neighbourhood of some professor, where anything is professed and practised but the art of life ; to survey the world through a telescope or a microscope, and never with his natural eye ; to study chemistry, and not learn how his bread is made, or mechanics,

and not learn how it is earned ; to discover new satellites to Neptune, and not detect the motes in his eyes, or to what vagabond he is a satellite himself ; or to be devoured by the monsters that swarm all around him, while contemplating the monsters in a drop of vinegar. There's many a well-meaning fellow who thinks he has a hard time of it who will not put his shoulder to the wheel,) being spell-bound, who sits about as if he were hatching his good intentions, and every now and then his friends get up a subscription for him, and he is cursed with the praise of being " a clever fellow."

When introduced to high life I cannot help perceiving how it is as a thing jumped at, and I find that I do not get on in my enjoyment of the fine arts which adorn it, because my attention is wholly occupied with the jump, remembering that the greatest genuine leap on record, due to human muscles alone, is that of certain wandering Arabs who cleared twenty-five feet on level ground. The first question which I am tempted to put to the proprietor of such great impropriety is, " Who boosts you ? " Are you one of the ninety-nine who fail, or the hundredth who succeeds ?

We have heard a deal about English comfort. But may you not trace these stories home to some wealthy Sardanapalus who was able to pay for obsequious attendance and for every luxury ? How far does it describe merely the tact and selfishness of the wealthy class ? Ask the great mass of Englishmen and travellers, whose vote alone is conclusive, concerning the comfort they enjoyed in second and third class accommodations in steamboats and railroads and eating and lodging houses. Lord Somebody-or-other may have made himself comfortable, but the very style of his living makes it necessary that the great majority of his countrymen should be uncomfortable.

(c) *Criticism of labour-saving devices and economic co-operation and specialization*

They make a great ado nowadays about hard times ; but I think that the community generally . . . take a wrong view of the matter. . . . This general failure, both private and public, is rather occasion for rejoicing, as reminding us whom we have at the helm, that justice is always done. If our merchants did not most of them fail, and the banks too, my faith in the old laws of the world would be staggered. The statement that ninety-six in a hundred doing such business surely break down is perhaps the sweetest fact that statistics have revealed—exhilarating as the fragrance of sallows in the spring. Does it not say somewhere, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice"? If thousands are thrown out of employment, it suggests that they were not well employed. Why don't they take the hint? It is not enough to be industrious ; so are the ants. What are you industrious about ?

It may be guessed that I reduce almost the whole advantage of holding this superfluous property as a fund in store against the future, so far as the individual is concerned, mainly to defraying of funeral expenses. But perhaps a man is not required to bury himself. Nevertheless this points to an important distinction between the civilized man and the savage ; and, no doubt, they have designs on us for our benefit, in making the life of a civilized people an institution, in which the life of the individual is to a great extent absorbed, in order to preserve and perfect that of the race. But I wish to show at what a sacrifice this advantage is at present obtained, and to suggest that we may possibly so live as to secure all the advantage without suffering any of the disadvantage. What mean ye by saying that the poor ye have always with you, or that the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge ?

The only co-operation which is commonly possible is exceedingly partial and superficial ; and what little true co-operation there is, is as if it were not, being a harmony inaudible to men. If a man has faith, he will co-operate with equal faith everywhere ; if he has not faith, he will continue to live like the rest of the world, whatever company he is joined to. To co-operate in the highest as well as the lowest sense, means *to get our living together.*

Shall we forever resign the pleasure of construction to the carpenter ? What does architecture amount to in the experience of the mass of men ? I never in all my walks came across a man engaged in so simple and natural an occupation as building his house. We belong to the community. It is not the tailor alone who is the ninth part of a man ; it is as much the preacher, and the merchant and the farmer. Where is this division of labour to end ? and what object does it finally serve ? No doubt another *may* also think for me ; but it is not therefore desirable that he should do so to the exclusion of my thinking for myself.

When labour is reduced to turning a crank it is no longer amusing nor truly profitable ; but let this business become very profitable in a pecuniary sense, and so be "driven," as the phrase is, and carried on on a large scale, and the man is sunk in it.

### 3 WAR

I have a deep sympathy with war, it so apes the gait and bearing of the soul. It is a pity that we seem to require a war, from time to time, to assure us that there is any manhood still left in man.

Men have made war from a deeper instinct than peace. War is but the compelling of peace.

When the world is declared under martial law, every Esau retakes his birthright and what there is in him does not

fail to appear He wipes off all old scores and commences a new account. The world is interested to know how any soul will demean itself in so novel a position. But when war, too, like commerce and husbandry, gets to be a routine, and men go about it as indentured apprentices, the hero degenerates into a marine, and the standing army into a standing jest. When bravery is worsted, it joins the peace society. What is human warfare but just this—an effort to make the laws of God and Nature take sides with one party.

### SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

#### (a) *Religion does not correspond to an intuition of Nature*

There are various, nay incredible faiths ; why should we be alarmed at any of them ? What man believes, God believes. Every man worships his ideal of power and goodness, or God, and the New-Englander is just as much of an idolater as the Hindoo. Most people with whom I talk, men and women even of some originality and genius, have their scheme of the universe all cut and dried. . . . Some, to me, seemingly very unimportant and unsubstantial things and relations are for them everlasting settled—as Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and the like. . . . But in all my wanderings I never came across the least vestige of authority for these things. They have not left so distinct a trace as the delicate flower of a remote geological period on the coal in my grate. . . . To see from earth to heaven, and see there standing, still a fixture, that old Jewish scheme ! What right have you to hold up this obstacle to my understanding you, to your understanding me ! You did not invent it ; it was imposed on you. . . . Even Christ, we fear, had his scheme, his conformity to tradition, which slightly vitiates his teaching. He had not swallowed all formulas. He preached some mere

doctrines. As for me, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are now only the subtlest imaginable essences, which would not stain the morning sky. Your scheme must be the framework of the universe ; all other schemes will soon be ruins

(b) *Dogma is a myth*

I do not prefer one religion or philosophy to another. I have no sympathy with the bigotry and ignorance which make transient and partial and puerile distinctions between one man's faith or form of faith and another's—as Christian and heathen. I pray to be delivered from narrowness, partiality, exaggeration, bigotry. To the philosopher all sects, all nations, are alike. I like Brahma, Hari, Buddha, the Great Spirit, as well as God. Let God alone if need be. If I loved him more, I should keep him—I should keep myself rather—at a more respectful distance. It is not when I am going to meet him, but when I am just turning away and leaving him alone, that I discover that God is—I say, God. I am not sure that that is the name. You will know whom I mean.

What is religion? That which is never spoken.

Consider the dawn and the sunrise—the rainbow and the evening—the words of Christ and the aspiration of all the saints! Hear music! see, smell, taste, feel, heat—anything—and then hear these idiots, inspired by the cracking of a restless board, humbly asking, “Please, Spirit, if you cannot answer by knocks, answer by tips of the table”!!!

There is more religion in men's science, than there is science in their religion. In order to avoid delusions, I would fain let man go by and behold a universe in which man is but as a grain of sand. I am sure that those of my thoughts which consist, or are contemporaneous, with social personal connections, however humane, are not the wisest and widest, most universal. What is the village, city, state, nation, ay

the civilized world, that it should concern a man so much?

Christ was a sublime actor on the stage of the world. . . . Yet he taught mankind but imperfectly how to live; his thoughts were all directed toward another world. There is another kind of success than his. Even here we have a sort of living to get, and must buffet it somewhat longer.

(c) *How institutional religion weakens man*

It is wonderful, wonderful, the unceasing demand that Christendom makes on you, that you speak from a moral point of view. Though you be a babe, the cry is, Repent, repent. The Christian world will not admit that a man has a just perception of any truth, unless at the same time he cries, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner." They think they love God! It is only his old clothes, of which they make scarecrows for the children. Where will they come nearer to God than in those very children?

The church! it is eminently the timid institution, and the heads and pillars of it are constitutionally and by principle the greatest cowards in the community. The voice that goes up from the monthly concerts is not so brave and so cheering as that which rises from the frog-ponds of the land. The best "preachers" so called, are an effeminate class; their bravest thoughts wear petticoats. If they have any manhood they are sure to forsake the ministry, though they were to turn their attention to baseball.

It is our weakness that so exaggerates the virtues of philanthropy and charity and makes it the highest human attribute. The world will sooner or later tire of philanthropy and all religions based on it mainly.

I shudder when I think of the fate of innocence. Our charitable institutions are an insult to humanity. A charity which dispenses the crumbs that fall from its overloaded tables, which are left after the feasts!

(d) *Formal religions are hypocritical*

That nation is not Christian where the principles of humanity do not prevail, but the prejudices of race I expect the Christian not to be superstitious, but to be distinguished by the clearness of his knowledge, the strength of his faith, the breadth of his humanity. A man of another race, an African for instance, comes to America to travel through it, and . . . is kicked out of the cars and hotels, or only admitted to the poorest place in them.

It is encouraging to know that, though every kernel of truth has been carefully swept out of our churches, there yet remains the dust of truth on their walls, so that if you should carry a light into them they would still, like some powder-mills, blow up at once.

Priests and physicians should never look one another in the face. . . . They could not come together without laughter, or a significant silence, for the one's profession is a satire on the other's, and either's success would be the other's failure.

On Sundays the poor debtor goes to church to take an account of stock, and finds, of course, that his outgoes have been greater than his income. In the Catholic Church, especially, they go into chancery, make a clean confession, give up all, and think to start again. There are few things more disheartening and disgusting than when you are walking the streets of a strange village on the Sabbath, to hear a preacher shouting, like a boatswain in a gale of wind, and thus harshly profaning the quiet atmosphere of the day.

For eighteen hundred years, though perchance I have no right to say it, the New Testament has been written ; yet where is the legislator who has wisdom and practical talent enough to avail himself of the light which it sheds on the science of legislation ? One is educated to believe, and would rejoice if the rising generation should find no occasion

to doubt, that the State and the Church are on the side of morality, that the voice of the people is the voice of God

If Christ should appear on earth He would on all hands be denounced as a mistaken, misguided man, insane and crazed Those who have no knowledge of the divine appoint themselves defenders of the divine, as champions of the church, etc I have been astonished to observe how long some audiences can endure to hear a man speak on a subject which he knows nothing about, as religion for instance This young man, who is the main pillar of some divine institution, does he know what he has undertaken? If the saints were to come again on earth, would they be likely to stay at his house? would they meet with his approbation even? They who merely have a talent for affairs are forward to express their opinions A Roman soldier sits there to decide upon the righteousness of Christ And because they take his name in vain so often they presume that they are better than you Oh, their religion is a rotten squash)

Neither England nor American have [sic] any right to laugh at that sentence in the rare book called *The Blazon of Gentry*, written by a zealous student of heraldry, which says after due investigation that "Christ was a gentleman, as to the flesh, by the part of his mother and might have borne coat-armour The apostles also were gentlemen of blood, and many of them descended from that worthy conqueror, Judas Machabeus , but, through the tract of time, and persecution of wars, poverty oppressed the kindred and they were constrainyd to servile workes " Whatever texts we may quote or commentaries we may write, when we consider the laws and customs of these two countries we cannot fail to perceive that the above sentence is perfectly of a piece with our practical commentary on the New Testament The above is really a pertinent reason offered why Christianity should be embraced in England and America If I have got false teeth, I trust that I have not got

a false conscience. It is safer to employ the dentist than the priest to repair the deficiencies of Nature.

(e) *On social institutions generally*

Preaching ? Lecturing ? Who are ye that ask for these things ? What do ye want to hear, ye puling infants ? A trumpet-sound that would train you up to mankind, or a nurse's lullaby ? The preachers and lecturers deal with men of straw, as they are men of straw themselves. Why, a free-spoken man, of sound lungs, cannot draw a long breath without causing your rotten institutions to come toppling down by the vacuum he makes. Your church is a baby-house made of blocks, and so of the state. . . . If there were any magnanimity in us, any grandeur of soul, anything but sects and parties undertaking to patronize God and keep the mind within bounds, how often we might encourage and provoke one another by a free expression !

Freedom of speech ! It hath not entered into your hearts to conceive what those words mean. It is not leave given me by your sect to say this or that ; it is when leave is given to your sect to withdraw. The church, the state, the school, the magazine think they are liberal and free ! It is the freedom of a prison-yard. What is it you tolerate, you church to-day ? Not truth, but a lifelong hypocrisy. Let us have institutions framed not out of our rottenness, but out of our soundness. This factitious piety is like stale gingerbread. I would like to suggest what a pack of fools and cowards we mankind are. They want me to agree not to breathe too hard in the neighbourhood of their paper castles. If I should draw a long breath in the neighbourhood of these institutions, their weak and flabby sides would fall out, for my own inspiration would exhaust the air about them.

Look at your editors of popular magazines. . . . They want to get thirty thousand subscribers, and they will do anything to get them. . . . If they would let their sores

alone they might heal, and they could go to the wars again like men ; but instead of that they get together in meeting-house cellars, rip off the bandages and poultice them with sermons . How often is it that the shoemaker, by thinking over his last, can think a more valuable thought as he makes a shoe ?

All men sympathize by their lower natures , the few, only, by their higher. The appetites of the mistress are commonly the same as those of her servant The help may have some of the tenderloin, but she must eat it in the kitchen

From the experience of late years I should say that a man's seed was the direct tax of his race It stands for my sympathy with my race. When the brain chiefly is nourished, and not the affections, the seed becomes merely excremental

The evil is not merely a stagnation of blood, but a stagnation of spirit Of course, the mass of men, even the well-disposed but sluggish souls who are ready to abet when their conscience or sympathies are reached, cannot conceive of a man who is actuated by higher motives than they are Accordingly they pronounce him insane, for they know that they would never act as he does as long as they are themselves

I believe that in this country the press exerts a greater and more pernicious influence than the church We are not a religious people, but we are a nation of politicians We do not much care for, we do not read, the bible, but we do care for and we do read the newspaper It is a bible which we read every morning and every afternoon, standing and sitting, riding and walking. It is the bible which every man carries in his pocket, which lies on every table and counter, which the mail and thousands of missionaries are continually dispersing It is the only book which America has printed, and is capable of exerting an almost inconceivable influence for good or for bad. The editor is [a] preacher whom you

voluntarily support. . . . But how many of these preachers' preach the truth? I repeat the testimony of many an intelligent traveller, as well as my own convictions, when I say that probably no country was ever ruled by so mean a class of tyrants as are the editors of the periodical press in *this* country. Almost without exception the tone of the press is mercenary and servile.

And they do this for the most part, because they think so to secure the approbation of their patrons, and also, one would think, because they are not aware that a sounder sentiment prevails to any extent. There is no need of a law to check the licence of the press. Virtually, the community have come together and agreed what things shall be uttered, have agreed on a platform and to excommunicate him who departs from it, and not one in a thousand dares utter anything else. There are plenty of journals brave enough to say what they think about the government, this being a free one; but I know of none, widely circulated or well conducted, that dares say what it thinks about the Sunday or the Bible. They have been bribed to keep dark. They are in the service of hypocrisy.

What is it to be born free and not to live free? What is the value of any political freedom, but as a means to moral freedom?

#### ON FRIENDSHIP

As for missing friends—what if we do miss one another? have we not agreed on a rendezvous? While each wanders his own way through the wood, without anxiety, ay, with serene joy, though it be on his hands and knees, over rocks and fallen trees, he cannot but be in the right way. There is no wrong way to him. How can he be said to miss a friend, whom the fruits still nourish and elements sustain?

My difficulties with my friends are such as no frankness

will settle. There is no precept in the New Testament that will assist me. My nature, it may be, is secret. Others can confess and explain ; I cannot. It is not that I am too proud, but that is not what is wanted. Friendship is the unspeakable joy and blessing that results to two or more individuals who from constitution sympathize ; and natures are liable to no mistakes, but will know each other through thick and thin. Between two by nature alike and fitted to sympathize there is no veil and there can be no obstacle. Who are the estranged ? Two friends explaining.

I feel sometimes as if I could say to my friends, "My friends, I am aware how I have outraged you, how I have seemingly preferred hate to love, seemingly treated others kindly and you unkindly, sedulously concealed my love, and sooner or later expressed all and more than all my hate" I can imagine how I might utter something like this in some moment never to be realized. But let me say frankly that at the same time I feel, it may be with too little regret, that I am under an awful necessity to be what I am. If the truth were known, which I do not know, I have no concern with those friends whom I misunderstand or who misunderstand me.

The fates only are unkind that keep us asunder, but my friend is ever kind. I am of the nature of stone. It takes the summer's sun to warm it.

My acquaintances sometimes imply that I am too cold ; but each thing is warm enough of its kind. Is the stone too cold which absorbs the heat of the summer sun and does not part with it during the night ? Crystals, though they be of ice, are not too cold to melt, but it was in melting that they were formed. Cold ! I am most sensible of warmth in winter days. It is not the warmth of fire that you would have, but everything is warm and cold according to its nature. It is not that I am too cold, but that our warmth and coldness are not of the same nature ; hence when I am absol-

utely warmest, I may be coldest to you. Crystal does not complain of crystal any more than the dove of its mate. You who complain that I am cold find Nature cold. To me she is warm. My heat is latent to you. Fire itself is cold to whatever is not of a nature to be warmed by it. A cool wind is warmer to a feverish man than the air of a furnace. That I am cold means that I am of another nature.

What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another. What do we want most to dwell near to? Not to many men surely, the depot, the post-office, the bar-room, the meeting-house, the school-house, the grocery, Beacon Hill, or the Five Points, where men most congregate, but to the perennial source of our life, whence in all our experience we have found that to issue, as the willow stands near the water and sends out its roots in that direction. This will vary with different natures, but this is the place where a wise man will dig his cellar.

I have certain friends whom I visit occasionally, but I commonly part from them early with a certain bitter-sweet sentiment. That which we love is so mixed and entangled with that we hate in one another that we are more grieved and disappointed, ay, and estranged from one another, by meeting than by absence. Some men may be my acquaintances merely, but one whom I have been accustomed to regard, to idealize, to have dreams about as a friend, and mix up intimately with myself, can never degenerate into an acquaintance. I must know him on that higher ground or not know him at all. We do not confess and explain, because we would fain be so intimately related as to understand each other without speech. Our friend must be broad. His must be an atmosphere co-extensive with the universe, in which we can expand and breathe. For the most part we are smothered and stifled by one another. I go and see my

friend and try his atmosphere. If our atmospheres do not mingle, if we repel each other strongly, it is of no use to stay

How mean are our relations to one another ! Let us pause till they are nobler A little silence, a little rest is good It would be sufficient employment only to cultivate true ones

The richest gifts we can bestow are the least marketable We hate the kindness which we understand. A noble person confers no such gift as his whole confidence Perhaps it is only essential to friendship that some vital trust should have been reposed by the one in the other. I feel addressed and probed even to the remote parts of my being when one nobly shows, even in trivial things, an implicit faith in me When such divine commodities are so near and cheap, how strange that it should have to be each day's discovery ! A threat or a curse may be forgotten, but this mild trust translates me I am no more of this earth , it acts dynamically ; it changes my very substance. I cannot do what before I did I cannot be what before I was Other chains may be broken, but in the darkest night, in the remotest place, I trail this thread Then things cannot happen. What if God were to confide in us for a moment ! Should we not then be gods ?

How long we will follow an illusion ! On meeting that one whom I call my friend, I find that I had imagined something that was not there. I am sure to depart sadder than I came. Nothing makes me so dejected as to have met my friends, for they make me doubt if it is possible to have any friends. I feel what a fool I am. I cannot conceive of persons more strange to me than they actually are ; not thinking, not believing, not doing as I do ; interrupted by me. My only distinction must be that I am the greatest bore they ever had. Not in a single thought agreed ; regularly baulking one another. But when I get far away my thoughts return to them. That is the way

I *can* visit them. . . . Thus I am taught that my friend is not an actual person. When I have withdrawn and am alone, I forget the actual person and remember only my ideal. Then I have a friend again. I am not so ready to perceive the illusion that is in Nature. I certainly come nearer, to say the least, to an actual and joyful intercourse with her. Every day I have more or less communion with her, *as I think*. At least, I do not feel as if I must withdraw out of Nature. I feel like a welcome guest. Yet, strictly speaking, the same must be true of Nature and of man; our ideal is the only real. It is not the finite and temporal that satisfies or concerns us in either case.

I associate the idea of friendship, methinks, with the person the most foreign to me. This illusion is perpetuated, like superstition in a country long after civilization has been attained to. We are attracted toward a particular person, but no one has discovered the laws of this attraction. When I come nearest to that other *actually*, I am wont to be surprised at my selection. It may be enough that we have met *some time*, and now can never forget it. Some time or other we paid each other this wonderful compliment, looked largely, humanly, divinely on one another, and now are fated to be acquaintances forever. In the case of Nature I am not so conscious of this unsatisfied yearning.

If I am thus seemingly cold compared with my companion's warm, who knows but mine is a less transient glow, a steadier and more equable heat, like that of the earth in spring, in which the flowers spring and expand? It is not words that I wish to hear or to utter, but relations that I seek to stand in; and it oftener happens, methinks, that I go away unmet, unrecognized, ungreeted in my offered relation, than that you are disappointed of words. If I can believe that we are related to one another as truly and gloriously as I have imagined, I ask nothing more, and words are not required to convince me of this.

The kindness I have longest remembered has been of this sort—the sort unsaid ; so far behind the speaker's lips that almost it already lay in my heart. It did not have far to go to be communicated. The gods cannot misunderstand, man cannot explain. We communicate like the burrows of foxes, in silence and darkness, under ground. We are undermined by faith and love. How much more full is Nature where we think the empty space is than where we place the solids !—full of fluid influences. Should we ever communicate but by these ? The spirit abhors a vacuum more than Nature. There is a tide which pierces the pores of the air. These aerial rivers, let us not pollute their currents. What meadows do they course through ? How many fine mails there are which traverse their routes !

Your words make me think of a man of my acquaintance whom I occasionally meet, whom you, too, appear to have met, one Myself, as he is called. Yet, why not call him Yourself ? If you have met with him and know him, it is all I have done ; and surely, where there is a mutual acquaintance, the *my* and *thy* make a distinction without a difference.

Society is commonly too cheap. We meet at very short intervals, not having had time to acquire any new value for each other. . . . The value of a man is not in his skin, that we should touch him.

We always seem to be living just on the brink of a pure and lofty intercourse, which would make the ills and trivialness of life ridiculous. After each little interval, though it be but for the night, we are prepared to meet each other as gods and goddesses.

I love my friends very much, but I find that it is of no use to go to see them. I hate them commonly when I am near them. They belie themselves and deny me continually.

I perceive that we partially die ourselves through sympathy at the death of each of our friends or near relatives.

Each such experience is an assault on our vital force. It becomes a source of wonder that they who have lost many friends still live. After long watching around the sick-bed of a friend, we, too, partially give up the ghost with him, and are the less to be identified with this state of things.

I do not wish to see John ever again—I mean him who is dead—but that other, whom only he would have wished to see, or to be, of whom he was the imperfect representative. For we are not what we are, nor do we treat or esteem each other for such, but for what we are capable of being.

A man who missed his friend at a turn, went on buoyantly, dividing the friendly air, and humming a tune to himself, ever and anon kneeling with delight to study each little lichen in his path, and scarcely made three miles a day for friendship.

What if we feel a yearning to which no breast answers? I walk alone. My heart is full. Feelings impede the current of my thoughts. I knock on the earth for my friend. I expect to meet him at every turn; but no friend appears, and perhaps none is dreaming of me. I am tired of frivolous society, in which silence is forever the most natural and the best manners. I would fain walk on the deep waters, but my companions will only walk on shallows and puddles. I am naturally silent in the midst of twenty from day to day, from year to year. I am rarely reminded of their presence. Two yards of politeness do not make society for me. One complains that I do not take his jokes. I took them before he had done uttering them, and went my way. One talks to me of his apples and pears, and I depart with my secret untold. His are not the apples that tempt me.

The thought of you will be a new motive for every right action. You are another human being whom I know, and might not our topic be as broad as the universe? What

have we to do with petty rumbling news? We have our own great affairs.

Ah, I yearn towards thee, my friend, but I have not confidence in thee. We do not believe in the same God. I am not thou; thou art not I. We trust each other to-day, but we distrust to-morrow. Even when I meet thee unexpectedly, I part from thee with disappointment. Though I enjoy thee more than other men, yet I am more disappointed with thee than with others. I know a noble man; what is it hinders me from knowing him better? I know not how it is that our distrust, our hate, is stronger than our love. Here I have been on what the world would call friendly terms with one fourteen years, have pleased my imagination sometimes with loving him; and yet our hate is stronger than our love. Why are we related, yet thus unsatisfactorily? We almost are a sore to one another. Ah, I am afraid because thy relations are not my relations. Because I have experienced that in some respects we are strange to one another, strange as some wild creature. Ever and anon there will come the consciousness to mar our love that, change the theme but a hair's breadth, and we are tragically strange to one another. We do not know what hinders us from coming together. But when I consider what my friend's relations and acquaintances are, what his tastes and habits, then the difference between us gets named. I see that all these friends and acquaintances and tastes and habits are indeed my friend's self. In the first place, my friend is prouder than I am—and I am very proud, perchance.

Let us leave trifles, then, to accident; and politics, and finance, and such gossip, to the moments when diet and exercise are cared for, and speak to each other deliberately as out of one infinity into another—you there in time and space, and I here. For beside this relation, all books and doctrines are no better than gossip or the turning of a spit.

I am disappointed of relations, you of words.

## THE GOOD LIFE

(a) *A Vision of Man and Society*

I think that we are not commonly aware that man is our contemporary—that in this strange, outlandish world, so barren, so prosaic, fit not to live in but merely to pass through, that even here so divine a creature as man does actually live. Man, the crowning fact, the god we know. While the earth supports so rare an inhabitant, there is somewhat to cheer us. Who shall say there is no God, if there is a *just* man.

On every hand we observe a truly wise practice, in education, in morals, and in the arts of life, the embodied wisdom of many an ancient philosopher. Who does not see that heresies have some time prevailed, that reforms have already taken place? All this worldly wisdom might be regarded as the once unamiable heresy of some wise man.

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The faultfinder will find faults even in paradise.

I am something to him that made me, undoubtedly, but not much to any other that he has made. All I can say is that I live and breathe and have my thoughts.

What is peculiar in the life of a man consists not in his obedience, but his opposition, to his instincts. In one direction or another he strives to live a supernatural life. Man recognizes laws little enforced, and he condescends to obey them. In the moment that he feels his superiority to them as compulsory, he, as it were, courteously re-enacts them but to obey them.

It is narrow to be confined to woods and fields and grand aspects of Nature only. The greatest and wisest will still be related to men. Why not see men standing in the sun

and casting a shadow, even as trees ? I will try to enjoy them as animals, at least. They are perhaps better animals than men. Do not neglect to speak of men's low life and affairs with sympathy, though you ever so speak as to suggest a contrast between them and the ideal and divine. You may be excused if you are always pathetic, but do not refuse to recognize.

The millions are awake enough for physical labour ; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred million to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face ? When a man stands up serenely against the condemnation and vengeance of mankind, rising above them literally by a whole body—though he were a slave, though he were a freeman, though he were of late the vilest murderer, who has settled that matter with himself—the spectacle is a sublime one !

Consider the infinite promise of a man, so that the sight of his roof at a distance suggests an idyll or pastoral, or of his grave an Elegy in a Country Churchyard. How all poets have idealized the farmer's life ! What graceful figures and unworldy characters they have assigned to them ! Serene as the sky, emulating Nature with their calm and peaceful lives. As I come by a farmer's to-day, the house of one who died some two years ago, I see the decrepit form of one whom he has engaged to "carry through," taking his property at a venture, feebly tying up a bundle of fagots with his knee on it, though time is fast loosening the bundle that he is. When I look down on that roof I am not reminded of the mortgage which the village bank has on that property—that that family long since sold itself to the devil and wrote the deed with their blood. I am not reminded that the old man I see in the yard is one who has lived beyond his calculated time, whom the young one is merely "carrying

through" in fulfilment of his contract; that the man at the pump is watering the milk. I am not reminded of the idiot that sits by the kitchen fire.

(b) *Health*

Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the god he worships, after a style purely his own, nor can he get off by hammering marble instead. We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones. Any nobleness begins at once to refine a man's features, any meanness or sensuality to imbrute them.

. . . Only the healthiest man in the world is sensible to the finest influence; he who is affected by more or less of electricity in the air. Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each. . . Be blown on by all the winds. Open all your pores and bathe in all the tides of Nature, in all her streams and oceans, at all seasons. . . For all Nature is doing her best each moment to make us well. She exists for no other end. Do not resist her.

If the day and the night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs, is more elastic, more starry, more immortal—that is your success. All Nature is your congratulation, and you have cause momentarily to bless yourself.

(c) *Freedom and Frugality and Work*

As long as possible live free and uncommitted. It makes but little difference whether you are committed to a farm or the country jail. In spite of Malthus and the rest, there will be plenty of room in this world, if every man will mind his own business.

The most practically important of all questions, it seems to me, is how shall I get my living, and yet I find little or nothing said to the purpose in any book. Those who are living on the interest of money inherited, or dishonestly, i.e. by false methods, acquired, are of course incompetent to answer it. I consider that society, with all its arts, has done nothing for us in this respect. One would think, from looking at literature, that this question had never disturbed a solitary individual's musings. Cold and hunger seem more friendly to my nature than those methods which men have adopted and advise to ward them off.

It is hard for a man to take money from his friends, or any service. This suggests how all men should be related.

None can be an impartial or wise observer of human life but from the vantage ground of what we should call voluntary poverty.

Whether a man spends his day in an ecstasy or despondency, he must do some work to show for it, even as there are flesh and bones to show for him. The necessities of life for man in this climate may, accurately enough, be distributed under the several heads of Food, Shelter, Clothing and Fuel; for not till we have secured these are we prepared to entertain the true problems of life with freedom and a prospect of success. When he has obtained those things which are necessary to life, there is another alternative than to obtain the superfluities; and that is, to adventure on life now, his vacation from humbler toil having commenced.

Everything has its use, and man seeks sedulously for the best article for each use. The watchmaker finds the oil of the porpoise's jaw the best for oiling his watches. Man has a million eyes, and the race knows infinitely more than the individual. Consent to be wise through your race. It is a pleasant fact that you will know no man long, however low in the social scale, however poor, miserable, intemperate,

and worthless he may appear to be, a mere burden to society, but you will find at last that there is something which he understands and can do better than any other.

I am convinced, that if all men were to live . . . simply . . . thieving and robbery would be unknown. These take place only in communities where some have got more than is sufficient while others have not enough.

The world is a cow that is hard to milk ; life does not come so easy ; and oh, how thinly it is watered ere we get it ! But the young bunting calf, he will get at it. There is no way so direct. This is to earn one's living by the sweat of his brow. It is not necessary that a man should earn his living by the sweat of his brow, unless he sweats easier than I do.

I like best the bread which I have baked, the garment which I have made, the shelter which I have constructed, the fuel which I have gathered. When my eye ranges over some thirty miles of this globe's surface—an eminence green and waving, with sky and mountains to bound it—I am richer than Croesus.

#### (d) *Optimism*

My actual life is a fact, in view of which I have no occasion to congratulate myself ; but for my faith and aspiration I have respect. It is from these that I speak. Every man's position is in fact too simple to be described. I have sworn no oath. I have no designs on society, or Nature, or God. I am simply what I am, or I begin to be that. I *live* in the *present*. I only remember the past, and anticipate the future. I love to live. I love reform better than its modes. There is no history of how bad became better. I believe something, and there is nothing else but that. I know that I am. I know that another is who knows more than I, who takes an interest in me, whose creature,

and yet whose kindred, in one sense, am I. I know that the enterprise is worthy. I know that things work well. I have heard no bad news.

It is surprising how contented one can be with nothing definite—only a sense of existence. . . . I am ready to try this for the next ten thousand years, and exhaust it. How sweet to think of! . . . my extremities well charred, and my intellectual part, too, so that there is no danger of worm or rot for a long while. My breath is sweet to me. O how I laugh when I think of my vague, indefinite riches No run on my bank can drain it, for my wealth is not possession but enjoyment

#### ART AND BEAUTY

(a) *The perception of beauty is inward and personal, but beauty is immanent and essential*

Every leaf and twig was this morning covered with a sparkling ice armour, even the grasses in exposed fields were hung with innumerable diamond pendants, which jingled merrily when brushed by the foot of the traveller. It was literally the wreck of jewels and the crash of gems. It was as though some superincumbent stratum of the earth had been removed in the night, exposing to light a bed of untarnished crystals. The scene changed at every step, or as the head was inclined to the right or the left. . . . Such is beauty ever—neither here nor there, now nor then—neither in Rome nor in Athens, but wherever there is a soul to admire. If I seek her elsewhere because I do not find her at home, my search will prove a fruitless one.

There are many ways of feeling one's pulse. In a healthy state the constant experience is a pleasurable sensation or

sentiment. For instance, in such a state I find myself in perfect connection with Nature, and the perception, or remembrance even, of any natural phenomena, is attended with a gentle pleasurable excitement. Prevailing sights and sounds make the impression of beauty and music on me. But in sickness all is deranged. . . . You cannot perceive beauty but with a serene mind.

If it is possible to conceive of an event outside of humanity, it is not of the slightest significance, though it were the explosion of a planet. Every important worker will report what life there is in him. It makes no odds into what seeming deserts the poet is born. Though all his neighbours pronounce it a Sahara, it will be a paradise to him ; for the desert which we see is the result of the barrenness of our experience. No mere wilful activity whatever, whether in writing verses or collecting statistics, will produce true poetry or science.

Beauty is a finer utility whose end we do not see.

What are the natural features which make a township handsome? A river, with its waterfalls and meadows, a lake, a hill, a cliff or individual rocks, a forest, and ancient trees standing singly. Such things are beautiful; they have a high use which dollars and cents never represent. If the inhabitants of a town were wise, they would seek to preserve these things, though at a considerable expense; for such things educate far more than any hired teachers or preachers, or any at present recognized system of school education. I do not think him fit to be the founder of a state or even of a town who does not foresee the use of these things, but legislates chiefly for oxen, as it were. . . . Not that ornamental beauty is to be neglected, but, at least, let it first be inward-looking and essential, like the lining of a shell, of which the inhabitant is unconscious, and not mere outside garnishings.

(b) *Art is a vision of Nature impressed on man but never compares with Nature*

Is not Art itself a gall? Nature is stung by God and the seed of man planted in her. The artist changes the direction of Nature and makes her grow according to his idea. If the gall was anticipated when the oak was made, so was the canoe when the birch was made. Genius stings Nature, and she grows according to its idea. It is not in a man to determine what his style shall be. He might as well determine what his thoughts shall be.

A writer, a man writing, is the scribe of all nature; he is the corn and the grass and the atmosphere writing. It is always essential that we love to do what we are doing, do it with a heart. The maturity of the mind, however, may perchance consist with a certain dryness.

Poetry implies the whole truth. Philosophy expresses a particle of it . . . I fear only lest my expressions may not be extravagant enough—may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of our ordinary insight and faith so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced. . . . Nothing is so truly bounded and obedient to law as music, yet nothing so surely breaks all petty and narrow bonds. Whenever I hear any music I fear that I may have spoken tamely and within bounds. And I am convinced that I cannot exaggerate enough to lay the foundation of a true expression. As for books and the adequateness of their statement to the truth, they are as the tower of Babel to the sky. I do not know where to find in any literature, whether ancient or modern, any adequate account of that Nature with which I am acquainted. Mythology comes nearest to it of any.

Art can never match the luxury and superfluity of Nature . . . true art is but the expression of our love of nature. It is monstrous when one cares but little about trees but much

about Corinthian columns, and yet this is exceedingly common. The perfect work of art is received again into the bosom of nature whence its material proceeded, and that criticism which can only detect its unnaturalness has no longer any office to fulfil.

(c) *Art depends on the need for expression*

I don't know how much I assist in the economy of Nature when I declare a fact. Is it not an important part in the history of the flower that I tell my friend where I found it? Each knows that the other might as well have said what he said. All beauty, all music, all delight springs from apparent dualism but real unity.

Expression is the act of the whole man, that our speech may be vascular. The intellect is powerless to express thought without the aid of the heart and liver and of every member. Such is the cold skill of the artist. He carves a statue out of a material which is fluid as water to the ordinary workman. His sentiments are a quarry which he works.

(d) *Form and material are inseparable*

As for the graces of expression, a great thought is never found in a mean dress. All men are really most attracted by the beauty of plain speech, and they even write in a florid style in imitation of this. They prefer to be misunderstood rather than to come short of its exuberance.

Shall I not have words as fresh as my thoughts? . . . A genuine thought or feeling can find expression for itself, if it have to invent hieroglyphics. It has the universe for type-metal. It is for want of original thought that one man's style is like another's. It is not important that the poet should say some particular thing, but should speak in harmony with Nature. The tone and pitch of his voice is

the main thing . . . steady labour with the hands, which engrosses the attention also, is unquestionably the best method of removing palaver and sentimentality but of one's style, both of speaking and writing.

All these sounds, the crowing of cocks, the baying of dogs, and the hum of insects at noon, are the evidence of Nature's wealth or *sound* state. Such is the never failing beauty and accuracy of language, the most perfect art in the world ; the chisel of a thousand years retouches it.

(e) Great art transcends the actual, suggests the ageless and timeless

Facts should only be as the frame to my pictures ; they should be material to the mythology which I am writing ; not facts to assist men to make money, farmers to farm profitably, in any common sense ; facts to tell who I am, and where I have been or what I have thought ; as now the bell rings for evening meeting, and its volumes of sound, like smoke which rises from where a cannon is fired, make the tent in which I dwell. My facts shall be falsehoods to the common sense. I would so state facts that they shall be significant, shall be myths or mythologic. Facts which the mind perceived, thoughts which the body thought. . . .

The peculiarity of a work of genius is the absence of the speaker from his speech. He is but the medium. You behold a perfect work, but you do not behold the worker. I read its page, but it is as free from any man that can be remembered as an impassable desert. The man of most science is the man most alive, whose life is the greatest event. Senses that take cognizance of outward things merely are of no avail.

The eye which can appreciate the naked and absolute beauty of a scientific truth is far more rare than that which is attracted by a moral one. The highest condition of art

is artlessness. Truth is always paradoxical. The most distinct and beautiful statement of any truth must take at last the mathematical form.

Great works of art have endless leisure for a background, as the universe has space. Time stands still while they are created. The artist cannot be in a hurry. The earth moves round the sun with inconceivable rapidity, and yet the surface of the lake is not ruffled by it

(f) *Experience must be remembered to be material for art*

Our ecstatic states, which appear to yield so little fruit, have this value at least : though in the seasons when our genius reigns we may be powerless for expression, yet in calmer seasons, when our talent is active, the memory of those rarer moods comes to colour our picture and is the permanent paint-pot, as it were, into which we dip our brush. Thus no life or experience goes unreported at last ; but if it be not solid gold it is goldleaf, which gilds the furniture of the mind. It is an experience of infinite beauty on which we unfailingly draw, which enables us to exaggerate ever truly. Our moments of inspiration are not lost though we have no particular poem to show for them ; for those experiences have left an indelible impression, and we are ever and anon reminded of them. Their truth subsides, and in cooler moments we can use them as paint to gild and adorn our prose.

How is it that what is actually present and transpiring is commonly perceived by the common sense and understanding only, is bare and bald, without halo or the blue enamel of intervening air ? But let it be past or to come, and it is at once idealized. It is a deed ripe and with the bloom on it. It is not simply the understanding now, but the imagination, that takes cognizance of it. The imagination requires a long range. It is the faculty of the poet to

see present things as if, in this sense, also past and future, as if distant or universally significant. We do not know poets, heroes, and saints for our contemporaries, but we locate them in some far-off vale, and, the greater and better, the farther off we are accustomed to consider them. We believe in spirits, we believe in beauty, but not now and here. They have their abode in the remote past or in the future.

A transient acquaintance with any phenomenon is not sufficient to make it completely the subject of your muse. You must be so conversant with it as to *remember* it and be reminded of it long afterward, while it lies remotely fair and elysian in the horizon, approachable only by the imagination.

It is fatal to the writer to be too much possessed by his thought. Things must lie a little remote to be described. Poetry puts an interval between the impression and the expression—waits till the seed germinates naturally. There is no ripeness which is not, so to speak, something ultimate in itself, and not merely a perfected means to a higher end. In order to be ripe it must serve a transcendent use. The ripeness of a leaf, being perfected, leaves the tree at that point and never returns to it. It has nothing to do with any other fruit which the tree may bear, and only the genius of the poet can pluck it.

The poet is a man who lives at last by watching his moods. An old poet comes at last to watch his moods as narrowly as a cat does a mouse. The objects I behold correspond to my mood. I have observed that one mood is the natural critic of another. When possessed with a strong feeling on any subject foreign to the one I may be writing on, I know very well what of good and what of bad I have written on the latter. It looks to me now as it will ten years hence. . . What is tinsel or euphonism or irrelevant is revealed to such a touchstone. In the light of a strong feeling, all feelings,

all things take their places, and truth of every kind is seen for such.

(g) *Art suffuses life*

Every man understands why a fool sings . . . man is the great poet, and not Homer nor Shakespeare ; and our language itself, and the common art of life, are his work. Poetry is so universally true and independent of experience that it does not need any particular biography to illustrate it, but we refer it sooner or later to some Orpheus or Linus, and after ages to the genius of humanity and the gods themselves.

The wayfarer's tree ! How good a name ! Who bestowed it ? How did it get adopted ? The mass of men are very unpoetic, yet that Adam that names things is always a poet. The boor is ready to accept the name the poet gives. How nameless is the poet among us ! He is abroad, but is not recognized. He does not get crowned with the laurel.

(h) *Art and Genius*

A sort of necessary order in the development of Genius is, first, Complaint ; second, Plaint ; third, Love. The Man of Genius may at the same time be, indeed is commonly, an Artist, but the two are not to be confounded. The Man of Genius, referred to mankind, is an originator, an inspired or demonic man, who produces a perfect work in obedience to laws yet unexplored. The artist is he who detects and applies the law from observation of the works of Genius, whether of man or Nature. . . . There has been no man of pure Genius, as there has been none wholly destitute of Genius.

We talk of genius as if it were a mere knack, and the poet could only express what other men conceived. But

in comparison with his task, the poet is the least talented of any. . . . The gods do not grant him any skill more than another. They never put their gifts into his hands, but they encompass and sustain him with their breath.

The poet must bring to Nature the smooth mirror in which she is to be reflected. He must be something superior to her, something more than natural. He must furnish equanimity. No genius will excuse him from importing the ivory which is to be his material.

The poet is no tender slip of fairy stock, who requires peculiar institutions and edicts for his defence, but the toughest son of earth and of Heaven, and by his greater strength and endurance his fainting companions will recognize the God in him. It is the worshippers of beauty, after all, who have done the real pioneer work of the world.

A feeble writer and without genius must have what he thinks a great theme, which we are already interested in through the accounts of others, but a genius, a Shakespeare, for instance—would make the history of his parish more interesting than another's history of the world.

### (i) *Poetry is . . .*

It is only by a miracle that poetry is written at all. It is not recoverable thought, but a hue from a vaster receding thought. No definition of poetry is adequate unless it be poetry itself. The most accurate analysis by the rarest wisdom is yet insufficient, and the poet will instantly prove it false by setting aside its requisitions. It is indeed all that we do not know.

Poetry . . . is the simplest relation of phenomena, and describes the commonest sensations with more truth than science does, and the latter at a distance slowly mimics its style and methods. A true poem is distinguished not so much

by a felicitous expression, or any thought it suggests, as by the atmosphere which surrounds it. The grandeur of the similes is another feature which characterizes great poetry.

There are two classes of men called poets. The one cultivates life, the other art—one seeks food for nutriment, the other for flavour ; one satisfies hunger, the other gratifies the palate. There are two kinds of writing, both great and rare—one that of genius, or the inspired, the other of intellect and taste, in the intervals of inspiration. The former is above criticism, always correct, giving the law to criticism. It vibrates and pulsates with life forever. It is sacred, and to be read with reverence, as the works of Nature are studied. . . . It is in Shakespeare . . . in Burns . . . the other is self-possessed and wise. It is reverent of genius, and greedy of inspiration. It is conscious in the highest and least degree. It consists with the most perfect command of the faculties. . . . The works of Goethe furnish remarkable instances of the latter.

There is always a poem not printed on paper, coincident with the production of this, stereotyped in the poet's life. It is *what he has become through his work*. Every man will be a poet if he can ; otherwise a philosopher or man of science. This proves the superiority of the poet.

The poet's relation to his theme is the relation of lovers. It is no more to be courted. I do not know but the poet is he who generates poems. By continence he rises to creation on a higher level, a supernatural level.

It is wise to write on many subjects, to try many themes, that so you may find the right and inspiring one. . . . Improve the suggestion of each object however humble, however slight and transient the provocation. What else is there to be improved ? . . . It is not in vain that the mind turns aside this way or that. It is great art in the writer to improve from day to day just that soil and fertility which he has, to harvest that crop which his life yields, whatever it

'may be,' not be straining as if to reach apples or Granges when he yields only groundnuts. He should be digging, not soaring. Just as earnest as your life is, so deep is your soil. If strong and deep, you will sow wheat and raise bread of life in it. I omit the unusual—the hurricanes and earthquakes—and describe the common. This has the greatest charm and is the true theme of poetry. You may have the extraordinary for your province, if you will let me have the ordinary. Give me the obscure life, the cottage of the poor and humble, the workdays of the world, the barren fields, the smallest share of all things but poetic perception. Give me but the eyes to see the things which you possess.

(j) *Good books are . . .*

Books can only reveal us to ourselves, and as often as they do us this service we lay them aside. Books, not which afford us a cowering enjoyment, but in which each thought is of unusual daring, such as an idle man cannot read, and a timid one could not be entertained by, which even make us dangerous to existing institutions—such call I good books. It is the untamed, uncivilized, free and wild thinking in Hamlet, in the Iliad, and in all the scriptures and mythologies that delights us—not learned in the schools, not refined and polished by art. A truly good book is something as wildly natural and primitive, mysterious and marvellous, ambrosial and fertile, as a fungus or a lichen . . . The fault of our books and other deeds is that they are too humane; I want something speaking in some measure to the condition of muskrats and skunk-cabbage as well as of men—not merely to a pining and complaining coterie of philanthropists.

English literature from the days of the minstrels to the Lake Poets, Chaucer and Spenser and Shakespeare and Milton included, breathes no quite fresh and, in this sense, wild strain. It is an essentially tame and civilized literature,

reflecting Greece and Rome. Her wilderness is a green-wood, her wild man a Robin Hood. There is plenty of genial love of Nature in her poets, but [not so much of Nature herself]. Her chronicles inform us when her wild animals, but not when the wild man in her, became extinct. There was need of America I cannot think of any poetry which adequately expresses this yearning for the Wild, the *wilde*.

It is a relief to read some true book, wherein all are equally dead—equally alive. I think the best parts of Shakespeare would only be enhanced by the most thrilling and affecting events. . . . And so much the more, as they are not intended for consolation. It is no small recommendation when a book will stand the test of mere unobstructed sunshine and daylight . . . if men read aright, methinks they would never read anything but poems No history nor philosophy can supply their place.

In books, that which is most generally interesting is what comes home to the most cherished private experience of the greatest number. It is not the book of him who has travelled the farthest over the surface of the globe, but of him who has lived the deepest and been the most at home.

(k) *Music is . . .*

. . . the aspirations of ancient men, even such as were never communicated by speech, is music ! It is the flower of language, thought coloured and curved, fluent and flexible, its crystal fountain tinged with the sun's rays, and its purling ripples reflecting the grass and the clouds. I associate with it the idea of infinite remoteness, as well as of beauty and serenity, for to the senses that is farthest from us which addresses the greatest depth within us,

Music is the sound of universal laws promulgated. I am wont to find music unprofitable ; it is a luxury. It is surpris-

ang, however, that so few habitually intoxicate themselves with music, so many with alcohol. . . . It is remarkable that our institutions can stand before music, it is so revolutionary.

As I come over the hill I hear the woodthrush singing his evening lay. This is the only bird whose note affects me like music, affects the flow and tenor of my thought, my fancy and imagination. It lifts and exhilarates me. It is inspiring. It is a medicative draught to my soul. It is an elixir to my eyes and a fountain of youth to all my senses. It changes all hours to an eternal morning. It banishes all trivialness. It reinstates me in my dominion, makes me the lord of creation, is chief musician of my court. This minstrel sings in a time, a heroic age, with which no event in the village can be contemporary. . . . How can the infinite and eternal be contemporary with the finite and temporal? So there is something in the music of the cowbell, something sweeter and more nutritious, than in the milk which the farmers drink . . .

I long for wildness, a nature which I cannot put my foot through, woods where the woodthrush forever sings, where the hours are early morning ones, and there is dew on the grass, and the day is forever unproved, where I might have a fertile unknown for a soil about me. I would go after the cows, I would watch the flocks of Admetus there forever, only for my board and clothes.

All sound heard at the greatest possible distance produces one and the same effect, a vibration of the universal lyre, just as the intervening atmosphere makes a distant ridge of earth interesting to our eyes by the azurc tint it imparts to it. There came to me a melody which the air had strained, and which had conversed with every leaf and needle of the wood, that portion of the sound which the elements had taken up and modulated and echoed from vale to vale. The echo is, to some extent, an original sound, and therein is

the magic and charm of it. It is not merely a repetition of what was worth repeating in the bell, but partly the voice of the wood ; the same trivial words and notes sung by a wood-nymph.

### PROGRESS

It is not easy to make our lives respectable to ourselves by any course of activity. We have repeatedly to withdraw ourselves into our shells of thought like the tortoise, somewhat helplessly ; and yet there is even more than philosophy in that I do not love to entertain doubts and questions.

Undoubtedly if we were to reform this outward life truly and thoroughly, we should find no duty of the inner omitted. It would be employment for our whole nature ; and what we should do thereafter would be as vain a question as to ask a bird what it will do when its nest is built and its brood reared. But a moral reform must take place first, and then the necessity of the other will be superseded, and we shall sail and plough by its force alone.

Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end, an end which it was already but too easy to arrive at ; . . . I pray for such inward experience as will make Nature significant.

The nation itself, with all its so-called internal improvements, which, by the way, are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury, and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land ; and the only cure for it, as for them, is in rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast. Men think that it is essential that the *Nation* have commerce, and export

ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt, whether *they* do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain.

For the improvements of ages have had but little influence on the essential laws of man's existence: as our skeletons, probably, are not to be distinguished from those of our ancestors. As if we knew more about human life and a God than the heathen and the ancients!

We may believe it, but never do we lead a quiet, free life, such as Adam's, but are enveloped in an invisible net work of speculations. Our progress is only from one such speculation to another, and only at rare intervals do we perceive that it is no progress. After all, the theories and speculations of men concern us more than their puny accomplishment. How little do the most wonderful inventions of modern times detain us. They insult Nature. Every machine, or particular application, seems a slight outrage against universal laws.)

Again and again I am surprised to observe what an interval there is, in what is called civilized life, between the shell and the inhabitants of the shell—what a disproportion there is between the life of man and his conveniences and luxuries . . . I called at such a house this afternoon. . . . The woman was not in the third heavens, but in the third kitchen, as near the wood-shed or to outdoors and to the cave as she could instinctively get, for there she belonged—a coarse scullion or wench, not one whit superior, but in fact inferior, to the squaw in a wigwam, and the master of the house, where was he? He was drunk somewhere, on some mow or behind some stack, and I could not see him . . . If he had been as sober as he may be to-morrow it would have been essentially the same; for refinement is not in him, it is only in his house—in the appliances which he did not invent. So it is in Fifth Avenue and all over the civilized

world. . . . The hogs are in the parlour. This man and his wife—and how many like them!—should have sucked their claws in some hole in a rock. . . . The mass of men, just like savages, strive always after the outside, the clothes and finery of civilized life, the blue beads and tinsel and centre-tables . . . the appearance of wealth, dress and equipage alone command respect. They who yield to it are the heathen who need to have missionaries sent to them; and they who cannot afford to live and travel but in this *respectable* way are, if possible, more pitiable still.

It is true man can and does live by preying on other animals, but this is a miserable way of sustaining himself, and he will be regarded as a benefactor of his race, along with Prometheus and Christ, who shall teach men to live on a more innocent and wholesome diet. Is it not already acknowledged to be a reproach that man is a carnivorous animal?

I have just been through the process of killing the cistudo for the sake of science; but I cannot excuse myself for this murder, and see that such actions are inconsistent with the poetic perception, however they may serve science, and will affect the quality of my observations. I pray that I may walk more innocently and serenely through Nature. No reasoning whatever reconciles me to this act. It affects my day injuriously. I have lost some self-respect. I have a murderer's experience in a degree.

#### LIFE AS IMAGINATION AND ILLUSION

Sometimes in our prosaic moods, life appears to us but a certain number more of days like those which we have lived, to be cheered not by more friends and friendship but probably fewer and less. As, perchance, we anticipate the end of this day before it is done, close the shutters, and with a cheerless resignation commence the barren evening whose

fruitless end we clearly see, we despondently think that all of life that is left is only this experience repeated a certain number of times. And so it would be, if it were not for the faculty of imagination.

Why should just these sights and sounds accompany our life? Why should I hear the chattering of blackbirds, why smell the skunk each year? I would fain explore the mysterious relation between myself and these things. I would at least know what these things unavoidably are, make a chart of our life, know how its shores trend, that butterflies reappear and when, know why just this circle of creatures completes the world. Can I not by expectation affect the revolutions of Nature, make a day to bring forth something new?

Only the rich and such as are troubled with ennui are implicated in the maze of phenomena. You cannot see anything until you are clear of it. The long railroad causeway through the meadows west of me, the still twilight in which hardly a cricket was heard, the dark bank of clouds in the horizon long after sunset, the villagers crowding to the post office, and the hastening home to supper by candle-light, had I not seen all this before? . . . That we may behold the panorama with this slight improvement or change, this is what we sustain life for with so much effort from year to year.

For the most part, we are not where we are, but in a false position. Through an infirmity of our natures, we suppose a case, and put ourselves into it, and hence are in two cases at the same time, and it is doubly difficult to get out.

Exaggeration! was ever any virtue attributed to a man without exaggeration? was ever any vice, without infinite exaggeration? Do we not exaggerate ourselves to ourselves, or do we recognize ourselves for the actual men we are? Are we not all great men? Yet what are we actually, to speak of? We live by exaggeration. What else is it to

anticipate more than we enjoy? . . . To a small man every greater is an exaggeration. He who cannot exaggerate is not qualified to utter the truth.

All our life, *i.e.* the living part of it, is a persistent dreaming awake. Men cannot conceive of a state of things so fair that it cannot be realized. . . . Have we any facts to appeal to when we say that our dreams are premature? . . . If a man constantly aspires, is he not elevated? . . . Of course we do not expect that our paradise will be a garden. We know not what we ask. . . . we should see that our dreams are the solidest facts we know.

Dreams are real, as is the light of the stars and moon, and theirs is said to be a *dreamy* light. Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance. I realized what the Orientals mean by contemplation and the forsaking of works.

I find the actual to be far less real to me than the imagined. Why this singular prominence and importance is given to the former, I do not know. . . . I have never met with anything so truly visionary and accidental as some actual events. They have affected me less than my dreams. Whatever actually happens to a man is wonderfully trivial and insignificant—even to death itself, I imagine. He complains of the fates who drown him, that they do not touch *him*. They do not deal directly with him. I have in

my pocket a button which I ripped off the coat of the Marquis of Ossoli on the seashore the other day. Held up, it intercepts the light and casts a shadow—an *actual* button so called—and yet all the life it is connected with is less substantial to me than my faintest dreams. This stream of events which we consent to call actual, and that other mightier stream which alone carries us with it—what makes the difference? On the one our bodies float, and we have sympathy with it through them; on the other, our spirits. We are ever dying to one world and being born into another, and possibly no man knows whether he is at any time dead in the sense in which he affirms that phenomenon of another, or not. Our thoughts are the epochs of our life! All else is but as a journal of the winds that blew while we were here. So it seems to me and so significantly passes my life away. It is like the dreaming of frogs in a summer evening.

## DEATH

### (a) *Death is as natural as life because life lives on life*

We have got to know what both life and death are, before we can begin to live after our own fashion. Let us be learning our A-B-C's as soon as possible.

I once went in search of the relics of a human body—a week after a wreck—which had been cast up the day before on to the beach, though the sharks had stripped off the flesh. so completely smooth and bare was the beach—half a mile wide of sand—and so magnifying the mirage toward the sea that when I was half a mile distant the insignificant stick or sliver which marked the spot looked like a broken mast in the sand. As if there was no other object, this trifling sliver had puffed itself up to the vision to fill the void, and there lay the relics in a certain state,

rendered perfectly inoffensive by the surrounding scenery—a slight inequality in the sweep of the shore. Alone with the sea and the beach, attending to the sea, whose hollow roar seemed addressed to the ears of the departed—articulate speech to them. It was as conspicuous on that sandy plain as if a generation had laboured to pile up a cairn there. That dead body possessed the shore as no living one could.

How much beauty in decay! I pick up a white oak leaf, dry and stiff, but yet mingled red and green, October-like, whose pulpy part some insect has eaten beneath, exposing the delicate network of its veins. It is very beautiful held up to the light. In each case it is some little gourmand, working for another end, that reveals the wonders of Nature.

What an anxious and adventurous life the small fishes must live, liable at any moment to be swallowed by the larger. No fish of moderate size can go sculling along safely in any part of the stream, but suddenly there may come rushing out of this jungle or that some greedy monster and gulp it down. Parent fishes, if they care for their offspring, how can they trust them abroad out of their sight? It takes so many young fishes a week to fill the maw of this large one. I wonder how I can live this slimy, beastly kind of life, eating and drinking.

I see a large black cricket on the river, a rod from shore, and a fish is leaping at it. As long as the fish leaps, it is motionless as if dead, but as soon as it feels my paddle under it, it is lively enough. You may see these crickets now everywhere in the ruts, as in the cross-road from the Turnpike to the Great Road, creeping along, or oftenest three or four together, absorbed in feeding on, i.e. sucking the juices of, a crushed companion. There are two broad ruts made by ox-carts loaded with muck, and a cricket has been crushed or wounded every four or five feet in each.

It is one long slaughter-house. But as often as a car goes by, the survivors each time return quickly to their seemingly luscious feast. At least two kinds there.

I see on the top of the Cliffs to-day the dung of a fox, consisting of fur, with part of the jaw and one of the long rodent teeth of a woodchuck in it, and the rest of it huckleberry seeds with some whole berries. I saw exactly the same beyond Goose Pond a few days ago, on a rock—except that the tooth (a curved rodent) was much smaller, probably of a mouse. It is evident, then, that the fox eats huckleberries and so contributes very much to the dispersion of this shrub, for there were a number of entire berries in its dung—in both the last two I chanced to notice. To spread these seeds, Nature employs not only a great many birds but this restless ranger the fox. Like ourselves, he likes two courses, rabbits and huckleberries.

Just within the edge of the wood, there, I see a small painted turtle on its back, with its head stretched out as if to turn over . . . I stooped to investigate the cause. It drew in its head at once, but I noticed that its shell was partially empty. I could see through it from side to side as it lay, its entrails having been extracted through large openings just before the hind legs. The dead leaves were flattened for a foot over, where it had been operated on, and were a little bloody. Its paunch lay on the leaves, and contained much vegetable matter—old cranberry leaves, etc. Judging by the striae, it was not more than five or six years old—or four or five. Its fore parts were quite alive, its hind legs apparently dead, its inwards gone; apparently its spine perfect. The flies had entered it in numbers. What creature could have done this which it would be difficult for a man to do? I thought of a skunk, weazel, mink, but I do not believe that they could have got their snouts into so small a space as that in front of the hind legs between the shells. The hind legs themselves had not been

injured nor the shell scratched. I thought it most likely that it was done by some bird of the heron kind which has a long and powerful bill. And probably this accounts for the many dead turtles which I have found and thought died from disease. Such is Nature, who gave one creature a taste or yearning for another's entrails as its favourite tidbit ! I thought the more of a bird, for, just as we were shoving away from this isle, I heard a sound just like a small dog barking hoarsely, and looking up, saw it was made by a bittern, a pair of which were flapping over the meadows and probably had a nest in some tussock thereabouts . . . notwithstanding its horny shell, when it comes forth to lay its eggs it runs the risk of having its entrails plucked out.

In the path through Hosmer's pines beyond the Assabet, see a wood turtle—whose shell has apparently had one or two mouthfuls taken out of it on the sides—eating in a leisurely manner a common pink-topped toadstool some two inches in diameter, which it had knocked down and half consumed. Its jaws were covered with it.

I see, at Martial Miles's, two young woodchucks, taken sixteen days ago, when they were perhaps a fortnight old. There were four in all, and they were dug out by the aid of a dog. The mother successively *pushed out* her little ones to the dog to save herself, and one was at once killed by the dog.

"Oh, the muskrats are the greatest fellows to gnaw their legs off. Why, I caught one once that had just gnawed his third leg off, this being the third time he had been trapped ; and he lay dead by the trap, for he couldn't run on one leg " These would be times that tried men's souls, if men had souls to be tried , aye, and the souls of brutes, for they must have souls as well as teeth. Even the water-rats lead sleepless nights and live Achillean lives.

(b) But the death of the individual is no "death" in Nature because it is only a return to the immanent creativity of Nature

Even these deeds of death are interesting as evidences of life, for life will still prevail in spite of all accidents. I have a certain faith that even musquash are immortal and not born to be killed by . . . double B shot. . . .

I hear a good many pretend that they are going to die ; or that they have died, for aught I know. Nonsense ! I'll defy them to do it They haven't got life enough in them. They'll deliquesce like fungi, and keep a hundred eulogists mopping the spot where they left off. Only half a dozen or so have died since the world began. *Memento mori !* . . . They've understood it in a grovelling and snivelling sense They've wholly forgotten how to die. Be sure you die. Finish your work. Know when to leave off. Men make a needless ado about taking lives—capital punishment. Where is there any life to take ? You don't know what it means to let the dead bury the dead

Change is change No new life occupies the old bodies—they decay. It is born, and grows and flourishes. Men very pathetically inform the old, accept and wear it. Why put up with the almshouse when you may go to heaven ? It is embalming—no more. Let alone your ointments and your linen swathes, and go into an infant's body You see in the catacombs of Egypt the result of that experiment—that is the end of it. Be it life or death, we crave only reality. If we are really dying, let us hear the rattle in our throats and feel cold in the extremities ; if we are alive, let us go about our business

Every part of Nature teaches that the passing away of one life is the making room for another. Consider what a difference there is between living and dying. To die is not to begin to die and continue ; it is not a state of continuance,

but of transientness ; but to live is a condition of continuance, and does not mean to be born merely There is no continuance of death. It is a transient phenomenon. Nature presents nothing in a state of death.

I saw an old bone in the woods covered with lichens, which looked like the bone of an old settler, which yet some little animal had recently gnawed, and I plainly saw the marks of its teeth, so indefatigable is Nature to strip the flesh from bones and return it to dust again No little rambling beast can go by some dry and ancient bone but he must turn aside and try his teeth upon it An old bone is knocked about till it become dust; Nature has no mercy on it. It was quite too ancient to suggest disagreeable associations. . . . It survives like the memory of a man With time all that was personal and offensive wears off The tooth of envy may sometimes gnaw it and reduce it more rapidly, but is much more a prey to forgetfulness Lichens grow upon it, and at last, in what moment no man knows, it has completely wasted away and ceased to be a bone any longer.

The skeleton which at first sight excites only a shudder in all mortals becomes at last not only a pure but suggestive and pleasing object to science. The more we know of it, the less we associate it with any goblin of our imaginations. The longer we keep it, the less likely it is that any such will come to claim it We discover that the only spirit which haunts it is a universal intelligence which has created it in harmony with all Nature Science never saw a ghost, nor does it look for any, but it sees everywhere the traces, and it is itself the agent, of a Universal Intelligence.

(c) *The Spirit of Life, or Life Principle does not die—  
Transmigration*

I was struck by the gem-like, changeable, greenish reflections from the eyes of the grizzly bear, so glassy that

you never saw the surface of the eye. They [were] quite demonic. . . . It is unavoidable, the idea of transmigration; not merely a fancy of the poets, but an instinct of the race.

In midsummer we are of the earth—confounded with it—and covered with its dust. Now we begin to erect ourselves somewhat and walk upon its surface. I am not so much reminded of former years, as of existence prior to years.

As I was entering the Deep Cut, the wind, which was conveying a message to me from heaven, dropped it on the wire of the telegraph which it vibrated as it passed. It merely said: "Bear in mind, Child, and never for an instant forget, that there are higher planes, infinitely higher planes, of life than this thou art now travelling on. Know that the goal is distant, and is upward, and is worthy all your life's efforts to attain to." And then it ceased, and though I sat some minutes longer I heard nothing more.

Our thoughts are with those among the dead into whose sphere we are rising, or who are rising into our own. Others we inevitably forget, though they be brothers and sisters. . . . At death our friends and relations either draw nearer to us and are found out, or depart further from us and are forgotten.

Ah! I have penetrated to those meadows on the morning of many a first spring day, jumping from hummock to hummock, from willow root to willow root, when the wild river valley and woods were bathed in so pure and bright a light as would have waked the dead, if they had been slumbering in their graves, as some suppose. There needs no stronger proof of immortality. All things must live in such a light

